THE
Ramayana
OF
Valmeeki

RENDERED INTO ENGLISH

WITH EXHAUSTIVE NOTES

BY

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PREFACE

The Ramayana of Valmeeki is a most unique work.

The Aryans are the oldest race on earth and the most advanced; and the Ramayana is their first and grandest epic.

The Eddas of Scandinavia, the Niebelungen Lied of Germany, the Iliad of Homer, the Enead of Virgil, the Inferno, the Purgatorio, and the Paradiso of Dante, the Paradise Lost of Milton, the Lusiad of Camœns, the Shah Nama of Firdausi are Epics—and *no more*; the Ramayana of Valmeeki is an Epic—and *much more*.

If any work can claim to be the Bible of the Hindus, it is the Ramayana of Valmeeki.

Professor MacDonell, the latest writer on Samskritha Literature, says :—

"The Epic contains the following verse foretelling its everlasting fame :—

As long as mountain ranges stand
And rivers flow upon the earth,
So long will this Ramayana
Survive upon the lips of men.

This prophecy has been perhaps even more abundantly fulfilled than the well-known prediction of Horace. No product of Sanskrit Literature has enjoyed a greater popularity in India down to the present day than the *Ramayana*. Its story furnishes the subject of many other Sanskrit poems as well as plays and still delights, from the lips of reciters, the hearts of the myriads of the Indian people, as at the

great annual Rama-festival held at Benares. It has been translated into many Indian vernaculars. Above all, it inspired the greatest poet of medieval Hindustan, Tulasi Das, to compose in Hindi his version of the epic entitled *Ram Charit Manas*, which, with its ideal standard of virtue and purity, is a kind of Bible to a hundred millions of the people of Northern India."—*Sanskrit Literature*, p. 317. So much for the *version*.

It is a fact within the personal observation of the elders of our country, that witnesses swear upon a copy of the *Ramayana* in the law-courts. Any one called upon to pay an unjust debt contents himself with saying, "I will place the money upon the Ramayana, let him take it if he dares." In private life, the expression, "I swear by the Ramayana," is an inviolable oath I know instances where sums of money were lent upon no other security than a palm leaf manuscript of the Ramayana—too precious a Talisman to lose When a man yearns for a son to continue his line on earth and raise him to the Mansions of the Blessed, the Elders advise him to read the Ramayana or hear it recited, —or at least the Sundarakanda When a man has some great issue at stake that will either mend or mar his life, he reads the Sundarakanda or hears it expounded. When a man is very ill, past medical help, the old people about him say with one voice, "Read the Sundarakanda in the house and Maruthi will bring him back to life and health" When an evil spirit troubles sore a man or a woman, the grey-beards wag their wise heads and oracularly exclaim, "Ah! the Sundarakanda never fails" When any one desires to know the result of a contemplated project, he desires a child to open a page of the Sundarakanda and decides by the nature of the subject dealt with therein. (Here is a case in point. A year or two ago, I was asked by a young man to advise him whether he should marry or lead a life

of single blessedness. I promised to give him an answer a day or two later. When I was alone, I took up my Ramayana and asked my child to open it. And lo! the first line that met my eye was

Kumbhakarna-siro bhathi
Kundala-lamkritam mahath.

"The severed head of Kumbhakarna shone high and huge in the heavens, its splendour heightened by the ear-rings he wore."

I had not the heart to communicate the result to the poor man. His people had made everything ready for his marriage. I could plainly see that his inclinations too lay that way. I could urge nothing against it—his health was good, and his worldly position and prospects high and bright. Ah me! I was myself half-sceptical. So, quite against my better self, I managed to avoid giving him an answer. And he, taking my silence for consent, got himself married. Alas! *within a year* his place in his house was vacant; his short meteoric life was over; his health shattered, his public life a failure, his mind darkened and gloomy by the vision of his future, Death was a welcome deliverer to him; and an old mother and a child-wife are left to mourn his untimely end.

The Karma-kanda of the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Smrithis, the Mahabharatha, the Puranas, nay, no other work in the vast range of Samskritha literature is regarded by the Hindus in the same light as the Ramayana. The Karma-kanda is accessible only to a very few, an infinitesimal minority of the Brahmanas—the Purohiths who are making a living out of it; and they too know not its meaning, but recite it parrot-like. The Upanishads are not for the men of the world; they are for hard-headed logicians or calm-minded philosophers. The Smrithis are

but Rules of daily life. The Bharatha is not a very auspicious work; no devout Hindu would allow it to be read in in his house, for it brings on strife, dissensions and misfortune; the temple of the Gods, the Mathas of Sanyasins, the river-ghauts, and the rest-houses for the travellers are chosen for the purpose The Bhagavad-geetha enjoys a unique unpopularity; for, he who reads or studies it is weaned away from wife and child, house and home, friends and kin, wealth and power and seeks the Path of Renunciation. The Puranas are but world-records, religious histories.

But, for a work that gives a man everything he holds dear and valuable in this world and leads him to the Feet of the Almighty Father, give me the Ramayana of Valmeeki.

The Lord of Mercy has come down among men time and oft; and the Puranas contain incidental records of it short or long. But, the Ramayana of Valmeeki is the *only biography* we have of the Supreme One.

" Nothing that relates to any of the actors in that great world-drama shall escape thy all-seeing eye—Rama, Lakshmana, Seetha, men and monkeys, gods and Rakshasas, their acts, their words, nay, their very thoughts, known or secret. Nothing that comes out of your mouth, consciously or otherwise, shall prove other than true." Such was the power of clear vision and clear speech conferred on the poet by the Demiurge, the Ancient of Days.

" What nobler subject for your poem than Sree Ramachandra, the Divine Hero, the soul of righteousness, the perfect embodiment of all that is good and great and the Director of men's thoughts, words and deeds in the light of their Karma?" And this Ideal Man is the *Hero* of the Epic.

"The cloud-capped mountains, the swift-coursing rivers and all created things shall pass away and be as

nought. But, your noble song shall outlive them and never fade from the hearts of men." This is the boon of immortality the *poem* shall enjoy.

" And as long as the record of Rama's life holds sway over the hearts of men, so long shall you sit by me in my highest heaven." This is the eternity of fame that comes to *the singer* as his guerdon

The Hero, the Epic, and the Poet are the most perfect any one can conceive.

It was composed when the Hero was yet upon earth, when his deeds and fame were fresh in the hearts of men. It was sung before himself. "And the poem they recite, how wonderful in its suggestiveness ! Listen we to it"—such was *his* estimate of the lay.

It was not written, but sung to sweet music Who were they that conveyed the message to the hearts of men ? The *very sons* of the Divine Hero. "Mark you the radiant glory that plays around them ? Liker gods than men ! . . . . Behold these young ascetics, of kingly form and mien. Rare singers are they and of mighty spiritual energy withal"—and this encomium was from him who is Incarnate Wisdom.

What audience did they sing to ? "Large concourses of Brahmanas and warriors, sages and saints . . . . Through many a land they travelled and sang to many an audience.

Thus many a time and oft did these boys recite it in crowded halls and broad streets, in sacred groves and sacrificial grounds. . . . . And Rama invited to the assembly the *literati*, the theologians, the expounders of sacred histories, grammarians, Brahmanas grown grey in knowledge and experience, phonologists, musical experts, poets, rhetoricians, logicians, ritualists, philosophers, astronomers, astrologers, geographers, linguists, statesmen politicians, professors of music and dancing, painters

sculptors, minstrels, physiognomists, kings, merchants, farmers, saints, sages, hermits, ascetics . . . ."

What was the effect produced on the hearers?

"And such the perfectness of expression and delicacy of execution, that the hearers followed them with their hearts and ears, and such the marvellous power of their song, that an indescribable sense of bliss gradually stole over them and pervaded their frame and every sense and faculty of theirs—strange, overpowering and almost painful in its intensity"

What was the critical estimate of the audience?

"What charming music! what sweetness and melody of verse! And then, the vividness of narration! We seem to live and move among old times and scenes long gone by. .

A rare and noble epic this, the Ramayana of honeyed verses and faultless diction, beautifully adapted to music, vocal or instrumental and charming to hear, begun and finished according to the best canons of the art, the most exacting critic cannot praise it too highly, the first of its kind and an unapproachable ideal for all time to come, the best model for all future poets, the thrice-distilled Essence of the Holy Scriptures, the surest giver of health and happiness, length of years and prosperity, to all who read or listen to it. And, proficients as ye are in every style of music, marvellously have ye sung it."

But what raises Ramayana from the sphere of literary works into "a mighty repository of the priceless wisdom enshrined in the Vedas?" The sacred monosyllable, the Pranava, is the mystic symbol of the Absolute, the Gayathri is an exposition of the Pranava, the Vedas are the paraphrase of the Gayathri, and the Ramayana is but the amplification of the Vedic mysteries and furnishes the key thereto. Each letter of the Gayathri begins a thousand of its stanzas.

The poem is based upon the hymns of the Rig-veda aught to the author by Narada For, it is not a record of incidents that occurred during a certain cycle ; it is a symbolical account of cosmic events that come about in every cycle with but slight modifications , Rama, Seetha, Ravana and the other characters in the Epic are *archetypes and real characters*—a mystery within a mystery The numerous "Inner Meanings" of the Ramayana (vide *Introduction*) amply bear out the above remarks

There is not one relation of life, private or public, but is beautifully and perfectly illustrated in the words and deeds of the Ramayana characters (vide *Introduction* 'The Aims of Life')

EMORIA NARLA

It is not a poem of any one world-asset , it must find a place in every country, in every town, in every village and in every house

The Text

(*a*). *The Bengal recension* Charles Sardinia, helped Gorressio to bring of it in 1867

(*b*) *The Benares recension.* Between 1805—1810, Carey and Marshman, the philanthropic missionaries of Serampore, published the text of the first two kandas and a half In 1846, Schlegel brought out an edition of the text of the first two kandas In 1859, the complete text was lithographed at Bombay, and in 1860, a printed edition of the same appeared at Calcutta

(*c*) *The South Indian recension* —While the first two recensions are in Devanagari, this exists in the Grantha characters or in the Telugu This was unknown to the west and to the other parts of India until 1905, when Mr. T. R. Krishnacharya of Kumbakonam, Madras Presidency,

conferred a great boon upon the literary world by publishing a fine edition of it in Devanagari (1905). The earliest Grantha edition was published in Madras in 1891 by Mr. K. Subramanya Sastry, with the commentaries of Govindaraja, Mahesa-theertha, Ramanuja, Teeka-siromani and Peria-vachchan-Pillai. Mr. Raja Sastry of Madras has almost finished another edition of the same (1907), supplementing the above commentaries with that of Thilaka (till now accessible only in Devanagari). It shows a considerable improvement in the matter of paper, type, printing and get-up. Meanwhile, Mr Krishnacharya has begun another beautiful edition of his text (1911) with the commentary of Govindaraja and extracts from Thilaka, Theertheeya, Ramanujeeya, Sathyadharma-theertheeya, Thanisloki, Siromani, Vishamapada-vivrithi, Kathaka, Munibhavaprakasika etc. It will, when completed, place before the world many a rare and priceless information inaccessible till now.

Commentators

1. *Govindaraja.* He names his work the *Ramayana-Bhooshana* "an ornament to the Ramayana," ; and each kanda furnishes a variety of it—the anklets, the silk-cloth, the girdle, the pearl necklace, the beauty-mark between the eye-brows, the tiara and the crest-gem. He is of the Kausikas and the disciple of Sathakopa. The Lord Venkatesa appeared to him in a dream one night while he lay asleep in front of His shrine on the Serpent Mount and commanded him to write a commentary on the Ramayana ; and in devout obedience to the Divine call, he undertook the task and right manfully has he performed it. It is the most comprehensive, the most scholarly and the most authoritative commentary on the Sacred Epic, albeit his zealous Vaishnavite spirit surges up now and then in a hit at Siva and the Saivites. Priceless gems of traditional intert

pretations and oral instructions are embedded in his monumental work.

2. *Mahesa-theertha.* He declares himself to be the pupil of Narayana-theertha and has named his work *Ramayana-thathva-deepika.* "I have but written down the opinions of various great men and have nothing of my own to give, except where I have tried to explain the inner meaning of the remarks made by Viradha, Khara, Vali and Ravana". In fact, he copies out the commentary of Govindaraja bodily. He quotes Teeka-siromani and is criticised by Rama-panditha in his *Thilaka.*

3. *Rama-panditha.* His commentary, the *Ramayana-thilaka,* was the only one accessible to the world (outside of southern India), being printed in Devanagari characters at Calcutta and Bombay. He quotes from and criticises the *Ramayana-thathva-deepika* and the *Kathaka,* but makes no reference to Govindaraja. It may be the that work of the latter, being in the Grantha characters, was not available to him in Northern India; and Theertha might have studied it in the South and written *his* commentary in the Devanagari. Rama-panditha is a thorough-going, uncompromising Adwaithin, and jeers mercilessly at Theertha's esoteric interpretations. In the Grantha edition of the Ramayana, the Uthtnarakanda is commented upon only by Govindaraja and Theertha ; but, the Devanagari edition with the commentary of Rama-panditha, contains word for word, without a single alteration, the gloss of Mahesatheertha " I have tried in vain to explain or reconcile this enigma. But, the Adwaithic tenor of the arguments and the frequent criticisms of Kathaka, savor more of Rama-panditha than of Theertha.

4. *Kathaka.* I have not been able to find out the author of the commentary so named, which exists only in the extracts quoted in the *Thilaka.*

5. *Ramanuja.* He confines himself mainly to a discussion of the various readings of the text. What commentary he chances to write now and then, is not very valuable. He is not to be confounded with the famous Founder of the Visishtadwaitha School of Philosophy.

6. *Thanisloki.* Krishna-Samahvaya or as he is more popularly known by his Tamil cognomen, Peria-vachchan Pillay, is the author of it. It is not a regular commentary upon the Ramayana. He selects certain oft-quoted stanzas and writes short essays upon them, which are much admired by the people of the South, and form the cram-book of the professional expounder of the Ramayana. It is written in Manipravala—a curious combination of Samskritha and Tamil, with quaint idioms and curious twists of language. Many of the explanations are far-fetched and wire-drawn and reveal a spirit of Vaishnavite sectarianism.

7. *Abhaya-pradana-sara.* Sree Vedantha-desika, the most prominent personage after Sree Ramanuja, is the author of this treatise. It selects the incident of Vibheeshana seeking refuge with Rama (Vibheeshana-saranagathi) as a typical illustration of the key-note of the Ramayana—the doctrine of Surrender to the Lord, and deals with the subject exhaustively. It is written in the Manipravala, as most of his Tamil works are.

Translations

Gorresio published an Italian rendering of the work in 1870. It was followed by the French translation of Hippolyte Fauche's. In the year 1846, Schlegel gave to the world a Latin version of the first Kanda and a part of the second. The Serampore Missionaries were the first to give the Ramayana an English garb ; but they proceeded no further than two Kandas and a half. Mr. Griffith, Principal of the Benares College, was the first to translate the

Ramayana into English verse (1870—74). But, the latest translation of Valmeeki's immortal epic into English prose is that of Manmathanath Dutt, M. A., Calcutta (1894).

"Then why go over the same ground and inflict upon the public another translation of the Ramayana in English prose?"

1. Mr. Dutt has translated but the text of Valmeeki and that almost too literally; he has not placed before the readers the priceless gems of information contained in the commentaries.

2. The text that, I think, he has used is the one published with the commentary of Rama-panditha, which differs widely from the South Indian Grantha text in readings and in the number of stanzas and chapters.

3 More often than once, his rendering is completely wide of the mark. (It is neither useful nor graceful to make a list of all such instances. A careful comparison of his rendering with mine is all I request of any impartial scholar of Samskritha).

4. I venture to think that his translation conveys not to a Westerner the beauty, the spirit, the swing, the force and the grandeur of the original.

5. Even supposing that it is a faultless rendering of a faultless text, it is not all that is required.

6. As is explained in the Introduction, the greatness of the Ramayana lies in its profound suggestiveness; and no literal word-for-word rendering will do the barest justice to it.

7. Many incidents, customs, manners, usages and traditions of the time of Rama are hinted at or left to be inferred, being within the knowledge of the persons to whom the poem was sung; but to the modern world they are a sealed book.

8. Even such of the above as have lived down to our times are so utterly changed, altered, modified and over-laid by the accretions of ages as to be almost unrecognisable.

9. The same incident is variously related in various places.

Every one of the eighteen Puranas, as also the Mahabharatha, the Adhyathma Ramayana and the Ananda Ramayana, relates the coming down of the Lord as Sree Rama, but with great divergences of detail ; while the Padmapurana narrates the life and doings of Sree Rama in a former Kalpa, which differs very much in the main from the Ramayana of Valmeeki. The Adbhutha Ramayana and the Vasishtha Ramayana deal at great length with certain incidents in the life of Rama as are not touched upon by Valmeeki ; while the Ananda Ramayana devotes eight Kandas to the history of Rama after he was crowned at Ayodhya. Innumerable poems and plays founded upon Valmeeki's epic modify its incidents greatly, but base themselves on some Purana or other authoritative work.

10. Many a story that we have heard from the lips of our elders when we lay around roaring fires during long wintry nights and which we have come to regard as part and parcel of the life and doings of Rama, finds no place in Valmeeki's poem.

11. The poem was to be recited, not read, and to an ever-changing audience. Only twenty chapters were allowed to be sung a day, neither more nor less. Hence the innumerable repititions, recapitulations and other literary rapids through which it is not very easy to steer our frail translation craft. The whole range of Samskritha literature, religious and secular, has to be laid under contribution to bring home to the minds of the readers a fair and adequate idea of the message that was conveyed to humanity by Valmeeki.

12. A bare translation of the text of the Ramayana is thus of no use—nay, more mischievous than useful, in that it gives an incomplete and in many places a distorted

view of the subject. It is to the commentaries that we have to turn for explanation, interpretation, amplification, reconciliation and rounding off. And of these, the most important, that of Govindaraja, is practically inaccessible except to the Tamil-speaking races of India. The saints of the Dravida country, the Alwars from Sree Sathakopa downwards, have taken up the study of the Ramayana of Valmeeki as a special branch of the Vedantha and have left behind them a large literature on the subject, original and explanatory. The Divya-prabandhas and their numerous commentaries are all in the quaint archaic Tamil style known as Manipravala, and are entirely unknown to the non-Tamil-speaking world. With those teachers the Ramayana was not an ordinary epic, not even an Ithihasa. It was something higher, grander and more sacred. It was an Upadesa-Grantha—a *Book of Initiation* , and no true Vaishnava may read it unless he has been initiated by his Guru into its mysteries. It is to him what the Bible was to the Catholic world of the Medieval Ages ; only the Initiated, the clergy as it were, could read and expound it. Over and above all this, there are many priceless teachings about the Inner Mysteries of the Ramayana which find no place in written books. They form part of the instructions that the Guru gives to the Disciple by word of mouth.

13. Then again, there is the never-ending discussion about the method of translation to be followed. Max-Muller, the Grand Old Man of the Orientalist School opines thus :—" When I was enabled to collate copies which came from the south of India, the opinion which I have often expressed of the great value of Southern Mss. received fresh confirmation The study of Grantha and other southern Mss. will inaugurate, I believe, a new period in the critical treatment of Sanskrit texts. The rule which I have followed myself, and which I have asked my fellow-translators

to follow, has been adhered to in this new volume also, *viz.* whenever a choice has to be made between what is not quite faithful and what is not quite English, to surrender, without hesitation, the idiom rather than the accuracy of the translation. I know that all true scholars have approved of this, and if some of our critics have been offended by certain unidiomatic expressions occurring in our translations, all I can say is, that we shall always be most grateful if they would suggest translations which are not only faithful, but also idiomatic. For the purpose we have in view, a rugged but faithful translation seems to us more useful than a smooth but misleading one.

However, we have laid ourselves open to another kind of censure also, namely, of having occasionally not been literal enough. It is impossible to argue these questions in general, but every translator knows that in many cases a literal translation may convey an entirely wrong meaning."—Introduction to his Translation of the Upanishads. Part II, p. 13

"It is difficult to explain to those who have not themselves worked at the Veda, how it is that, though we may understand almost every word, yet we find it so difficult to lay hold of a whole chain of connected thought and to discover expressions that will not throw a wrong shade on the original features of the ancient words of the Veda. We have, on the one hand, to avoid giving to our translations too modern a character or paraphrasing instead of translating; while on the other, we cannot retain expressions which, if literally rendered in English or any modern tongue, would have an air of quaintness or absurdity totally foreign to the intention of the ancient poets.

While in my translation of the Veda in the remarks that I have to make in the course of my commentary, I shall frequently differ from other scholars, who have done

their best and who have done what they have done in a truly scholarlike, that is in a humble spirit, it would be unpleasant, even were it possible within the limits assigned, to criticise every opinion that has been put forward on the meaning of certain words or on the construction of certain verses of the Veda. I prefer as much as possible to vindicate my own translation, instead of examining the translations of other scholars, whether Indian or European."—From the Preface to his translation of the Rig-veda Samhitha.

In his letter to me of the 26th of January 1892, referring to my proposal to translate the Markandeya Purana as one of the Sacred Books of the East, he writes —

"I shall place your letter before the Chancellor and Delegates of the Press, and I hope they may accept your proposal. If you would send me a specimen of your translation, clearly written, I shall be glad to examine it, and compare it with the text in the *Bibliotheca Indica*. I have a Mss. of the Markandeya-purana. Possibly the palm leaf Mss. in Grantha letters would supply you with a better text than that printed in the *Bibliotheca Indica*."

But, Mrs. Besant, in her Introduction to 'The Laws of Manu, in the Light of Theosophy. By Bhagavan Das, M. A.,' takes a different view —

"One explanatory statement should be made as to the method of conveying to the modern reader the thought of the ancient writer. The European Orientalist, with admirable scrupulosity and tireless patience, works away laboriously with dictionary and grammar to give an "accurate and scholarly translation" of the foreign language which he is striving to interpret. What else can he do? But the result, as compared with the Original, is like the dead pressed 'specimen' of the botanist beside the breathing living flower of the garden. Even I, with my poor knowledge of Samskrit, know the joy of contacting the pulsing

virile scriptures in their own tongue, and the inexpressible dulness and dreariness of their scholarly renderings into English. But our lecturer is a Hindu, who from childhood upwards has lived in the atmosphere of the elder days; he heard the old stories before he could read, sung by grand-mother, aunt, and pandit; when he is tired now, he finds his recreation in chanting over the well-loved stanzas of an Ancient Purana, crooning them softly as a lullaby to a wearied mind; to him the 'well-constructed language' (Samskrit) is the mother-tongue, not a foreign language; he knows its shades of meaning, its wide connotations, its traditional glosses clustering round words and sentences, its content as drawn out by great commentators. Hence, when he wishes to share its treasures with those whose birthright they are not, he pours out these meanings in their richness of content, gives them as they speak to the heart of the Hindu, not to the brain of the European. His close and accurate knowledge of Samskrit would make it child's play for him to give "an accurate and scholarly translation" of every quotation; he has preferred to give the living flowers rather the dried specimens. Orientalists, in the pride of their mastery of 'dead' language, will very likely scoff at the rendering of one to whom it is a living and familar tongue, who has not mastered Samskrit as a man, but has lived in it from an infant For these, the originals are given. But for those who want to touch the throbbing body—rather than learn the names of the bones of the skeleton—of India's Ancient wisdom, for those these free and full renderings are given. And I believe that they will be welcomed and enjoyed."

The best test of a translation is that it must not at all appear to be a translation. Some hold that a translation must be a guide to the text, a 'crib' as it were, and should enable any one ignorant of the original language

to master it easily and sooner. I believe that a translation is meant to convey to a foreigner the thoughts, the ideas and the *heart* of the writer; it is not to be a dictionary and grammar combined. A faithful translation and a literal are contradictory terms; no word-for-word, wooden rendering can be any other thing than faithless; and no good translation can be literal. No two races think alike; the same thought, the same fact requires to be clothed in different words, in different expressions to reach the mind of the hearer. A translation should be faithful not to the words, not to the constructions, not to the grammar of the original, so much as to the *Kavi-hridaya*, 'the heart of the poet.' Curious notions of literary accuracy have rendered the translations of the Orientalists perfectly useless. Useless to those ignorant of Samskritha, in that it places before them strange thoughts and foreign modes of life and speech in an English garb, but not as they speak it, not as they understand it; useless to the people to whose literature they belong, in that the translators are foreigners.

They have no sympathy with the writer, or with the subject or with the people whose thoughts they attempt to place before the world. They bring to the work a prejudiced heart, a cold hyper-critical intellect, and an iconoclastic pen. Everything that they cannot understand, everything that they cannot reconcile with their preconceived notions of men and things, of God and the Universe, they throw overboard, without a glance at it, without a pang, just as the grave-digger cast aside the skull of Yorick the jester. They fix the correct readings; they sit in dread judgment over the commentators who were born in and breathed the very atmosphere of the poet and of his nation; they give the right meaning of words; they formulate the canons of interpretation; they judge of the stage of

progress the people might have attained in the march of material civilisation. They fit every event in the life of a non-christian nation to their Procrustean bed of Biblical chronology ; there was no civilisation superior to *their* own ; there was nothing good or noble, spoken or done, before *their* chosen people, the Lord's Elect, came into the world ; nothing is historical to them except *their* own made-up, lame accounts of the last 2,000 years. That is *their* Time ; that is *their* Eternity. They are very wise men—the Orientalists ; they are psychometrical adepts. Place any thing before them, a rag, a thigh-bone, a tooth, a coin, or a piece of stone and they will spin you an interminable yarn of the man, of the beast or of the people—their history physical, mental, moral, political, literary, economic, industrial, religious—as if they were the very Maker of the objects they operate upon. They would search for history in a Book of Sacrificial hymns like the Rig-veda, in Ritualistic Manuals like the Yajur-veda, in a Book of Psalmody like the Sama-veda, in a book of Rimes and Charms, like the Atharva-veda. They would seek for 'historic finds' in moral text-books like the Smrithis, in sacred epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha ; nay, they profess to give you the life and thoughts of a nation from its grammar like the Maha-bhashya, from its philosophical works like the Vedantha literature, from its medical books like Vagbhata, Susrutha and Charaka ; and wonderful to relate ! they find history in treatises upon logic like Tarkasangraha, in *mathematical* works like the Leelavathi and the Beejaganitha ! ! Nothing is too trivial, too humble, too insignificant for them ; their historical appetite is omnivorous.

I would give anything to know what *they* might feel like, if an orthodox Brahmana or a Charvaka Atheist were to

place before the English Christian reading world an English version of the Hebrew Bible; if he should have the additional advantage of only a nodding acquaintance with the language; if he should never have set his eye on the people whose revealed Scriptures he professes to further reveal; if he should never have come across the real Sacred Books of the East; if he should have come into contact only with the lowest strata of the nation or with unprincipled renegades to the faith of their fathers, if he should not even dream of access to the higher classes, their homes, their life, their words, their acts, their joys, their sorrows, their virtues, their vices, their faith, and their sceptism; if he should be imbued with a supremely high notion of his omniscience, of his unerring keenness, of his literary infallibility; if he should take it for granted that *his* race is the chosen one, that *his* religion is the only true one and that the others are false, that *his* people are destined to march for ever in the forefront of civilisation, prosperity and power. Now what would the orthodox English Christian or the devout Bishops and Archbishops think of such a version of the Holy Bible, embellished to boot, with original commentaries, remarks, reconciliations and judgments *ex-cathedra*, based mostly upon the unhealthy fumes of his imagination and prejudices? How would the English nation like to have *its* history written, say, 5000 years hence, from stray coins, from mouldering skeletons, from moss-covered pieces of stone and architecture, from its 'Book of Common Prayer,' from its 'Book of Psalmody', from the 'Paradise Lost' of Milton, from the 'Holy Living' of Taylor, from Abbott's Shakespearian Grammar, from Jevon's Logic, from Masson's British Philosophy, from Barnard Smith's Arithmetic, from Todhunter's Algebra and Geometry, from Webster's Dictionary, from its scientific, medical, industrial, and

mechanical treatises, and the other decaying rubbish of a forgotten nation buried under the mounds of the Past?

That is exactly how the true Arya feels when he reads translations like that of Max-Muller, Griffith and their ilk or original critical estimates like those of Weber & Co., the Orientalist Iconoclasts. Western historians depict in glowing colors and sneering language how Mahommad of Ghazni destroyed the idol of Somanatha; but Weber & Co. essay to shatter to pieces *the faith of millions*, their guide here and there hope hereafter. *Well, as he soweth so shall he reap.* My opinion of the whole class and of their Indian parasites is the same as what I expressed in the Preface to my "Life and Teachings of Sree Ramanuja;" and I quote it for the benefit of those who have not come across that book.

"What care I about your coins and inscriptions, your pillars, and mounds, the dry bones of History? To me it is of far more importance how a man lived and worked among his fellows, than when and where he was born and died, where he was at a particular date, when he wrote such and such a book, whether he was tall or short, dark or fair, single or married, a flesh-eater or a vegetarian, a teetotaller or no, what particular dress he affected, and so on. And yet more important still it is to me what a man thought and wrote, than how he lived and died. Your Orientalists! Heaven save me from the brood. Mischief enough they have done, those human ghouls that haunt the charnel houses of Antiquity, where rot the bones of men and events of the Dead Past. They have played sad havoc with the fair traditions of our forefathers, that placed ideas before facts and theories, and the development of a nation's heart before 'historical finds' or 'valuable discoveries'. Many a young man of promise they have turned away to

paths uncongenial, where his bray betrays the animal within the skin. You will find no such antiquarian twaddle in my book."

Well do they fit in with the lines of Tennyson.

" Those monstrous males that carve the living hound,
And cram him with the fragments of the grave,
Or in the dark dissolving human heart,
And holy secrets of this microcosm,
Dabbling a shameless hand with shameful jest,
Encarnalize their spirits , " *The Princess*

Gladly would I exchange shiploads of them for one Sir Edwin Arnold.

One more extract, this time from ' The Zanoni' of Lytton and I have done.

" The conduct of the individual can affect but a small circle beyond himself ; the permanent good or evil that he works to others lies rather in the sentiments he can diffuse. His acts are limited and momentary , his sentiments may pervade the universe, and inspire generations till the day of doom. All our virtues, all our laws, are drawn from books and maxims, which are sentiments, not from deeds. In conduct, Julian had the virtues of a Christian, and Constantine, the vices of a Pagan. The sentiments of Julian reconverted thousands to Paganism , those of Constantine helped, under Heaven's will, to bow to Christianity the nations on the earth. In conduct, the humblest fisherman on yonder sea, who believes in the miracles of San Gennaro, may be a better man than Luther. To the sentiments of Luther the mind of Modern Europe is indebted for the noblest revolution it has known. Our opinions, young Englishman, are the angel part of us ; our acts, the earthly". *Book I*, *Chapter* 5.

Alas ! The History of India by the Reverend Dr. Sinclair, is at present more authoritative in the eyes of the school boys than the Ramayana of Valmeeki or the Puranas of Vyasa. The History of Samskritha Literature by Messrs.

Max Muller, Weber, Monier Williams, MacDonell, etc., is the last word upon the writings of the Aryans, religious or secular. *Translations* are quoted and the *originals* are decried or are unknown. Verily, we are in the Iron Age, in the everdownward cycle of the Kaliyuga.

I hold that any History of India worth reading ought to be written by a true-hearted Hindu; I hold that the sacred books of the Hindus ought to be translated by a Hindu, by a Brahmana; by one that has faith in the virtues and manhood of his people, in the wisdom and philanthropy of his forefathers; by one that combines in himself a deep and comprehensive knowledge of the literature and traditions of his country, and of that to which he means to convey his message—*but never one of alien faith, nor a follower of Christianity without Christ, nor an apostate seeking to curry favour with the ruling race and the leaders of Western thought.* Now, in the case of the Ramayana of Valmeeki, it is all the more imperative that the Translator should possess the additional qualification of a thorough knowledge of the Tamil religious literature of the Dravidian School of Vaishnavism, that he should have been brought up in and saturated with the atmosphere of those amongst whom the Ramayana is recited and listened to with profound faith and devotion and to whom it is not a bare literary work but a living reality, a sacred Book, one that can mould their life here and hereafter.

As to the cobwebs of Western speculation about the historical value of the Ramayana, its date, the contemporary mention of it, the critical biography of the poet, its posteriority or otherwise to the Mahabharatha, its being a Zodiacal allegory or an account of the spread of the conquering Aryans into the South of India, about Rama being the type of the husbandman and Seetha being a symbol of agriculture and such-like Orientalist twaddle run riot, I have my

own opinion, certainly not creditable to them or to their authors. It is an open secret how History is written. The Boer war is within the memory of most of us; but, I have seen three diametrically different versions of it. The most important elements of a man's life or of a nation's are their thoughts. And History, to deserves its reputation of being "Philosophy teaching by example", should record *them* alone and not dry facts and dates. The history of western nations do not run back, honestly speaking, farther than 2,000 years; and huge libraries are already filled to overflowing with the records of that small period. The Aryans, who have, as *we* believe, existed as a separate race on this planet for over 5 millions of years, can but afford to preserve *their highest and most valuable thoughts. That forms their History* and is inextricbly woven into their religion, morality and philosophy *That* is "Philosophy teaching by example," and *no other.*

Is the Ramayana historically true? Is it a record of events that actually took place? The best answer I could make is in the words of the lecturer on the Bhagavad Geetha, Mrs. Besant. Her remarks apply equally well to the Ramayana or to any other Hindu Purana

"Now, in the Bhagavad-Geetha there are two quite obvious meanings, distinct and yet closely connected the one with the other, and the method of the connexion it is well to understand. First, the historical. Now, specially in modern days when western thought is so much swaying and coloring the eastern mind, Indians as well as Europeans are apt to shrink from the idea of historical truths being conveyed in much of the sacred literature; those enormous periods, those long reigns of kings, those huge and bloody battles, surely they are all simple allegory, they are not history. But what is history and what is allegory? History is the working out of the plan of the *Logos,* His plan, His

scheme for evolving humanity; and history is also the story of the evolution of a *World Logos*, who will rule over some world-system of the future. That is history, the life-story of an evolving *Logos* in the working out of the plan of the ruling *Logos*. And when we say *allegory*, we only mean a smaller history, a lesser history, the salient points of which, reflexions of the larger history, are repeated in the life-story of each individual Jivatma, each individual embodied spirit. History, seen from the true standpoint, is the plan of the ruling *Logos* for the evolution of a future *Logos*, manifested in all planes and visible on the physical, and therefore full of profoundest interest and full of profoundest meaning. The inner meaning, as it is sometimes called that which comes home to the hearts of you and me, that which is called the allegory, is the perennial meaning, repeated over and over again in each individual, and is really the same in miniature. In the one, Iswara lives in His world, with the future *Logos* and the world for his body, in the other, He lives in the individual man, with the Jeevatma and its vehicles for His body. But, in both are the one life and the one lord, and he who uuderstands either, understands the twain. None, save the wise, can read the page of history with eyes that see; none, save the wise, can trace in their own unfolding the mighty unfolding of the system in which a future *Logos* Himself is the Jeevatma and that ruling *Logos* is the Supreme Self; and inasmuch as the lesser is the reflection of the greater, inasmuch as the history of the evolving individual is but a poor faint copy of the evolving of the future *Logos*, therefore in the scriptures there is even what we call a double meaning—that history which shows a greater self-evolving, and the inner allegorical meaning that tells of the unfolding of the lesser Selves. We cannot afford to lose either meaning, for something of the richness of the

treasure will thus escape us ; and you must have steadily and clearly in mind that it is no superstition of the ancients, no dream of the forefathers, no fancy of the ignorant generations of far-off antiquity, that saw in the little lives of men reflections of the great Life that has the Universe for its expression. Nor should you wonder, nor be perplexed when you catch, now and again, in that unfolding picture, glimpses of things that, on a smaller scale, are familiar in your own evolving ; and instead of thinking that a myth is a cloudy something which grows out of the history of a far-off individual, exaggerated and enlarged, as is the modern fancy, learn that what *you* call myth is the truth, the reality, the mighty unfolding of the supreme Life which causes the shaping of a Universe ; and that what *you* call history, the story, the story of individuals, is only a poor faint copy of that unfolding When you see the likeness, learn that it is not the great that is moulded by the small ; it is the minute that is the reflexion of the mighty. And so, in reading the Bhagavad-Geetha, you can take it as history ; and then it is the great Unveiling, that makes you understand the meaning and the purpose of human history, and thus enables you to scan, with eyes that see, the panorama of the great unfolding of events in nation after nation, and in race after race. He who thus reads the Geetha in human history can stand unshaken amid the crash of breaking worlds. And you can also read it for your own individual helping and encouraging and enlightening, as an allegory, the story of the unfolding spirit within yourselves. And I have purposed this morning, to take these two meanings as our special study, and to show how the Geetha as history is the Great Unveiling, the drawing away of the veil that covers the real scheme which history works out on the physical plane ; for it was that which removed the delusion of Arjuna and made him able to do his

duty at Kurukshetra. And then, turning from that vaster plane, to seek its meaning as it touches the individual unfolding of the spirit, we shall see what that has of teaching for us, what that means for us of individual illumination; for just as history is true, so is allegory true. As the history, as we shall see, was the preparation for the India of the present, and the preparation for the India of the future, so also is that true which is elsewhere written in the Mahabharatha . " I am the Teacher and the Mind is my pupil." From that standpoint we shall see Sree Krishna as the Jagath-guru, the world-Guru, and Arjuna as the Mind, the Lower Manas, taught by the Teacher. And thus we may learn to understand its meaning for ourselves in our own little cycle of human growth.

Now, an Avathara is the Iswara, the *Logos* of a world-system, appearing in some physical form at some great crisis of evolution. The Avathara decends—unveils Himself would be a truer phrase; 'decends' is when we think of the Supreme as though far-off, when truly He is the all-pervasive Life in which we live ; to the outer eye only is it a coming down and descending—and such an Avathara is Sree Krishna. He comes as the *Logos* of the system, veiling Himself in human form, so that He may, as man, outwardly shape the course of history with mighty power, as no lesser force might avail to shape it. But the Avathara is also the Iswara of the human Spirit, the *Logos* of the spirit, the Supreme Self, the self of whom the individual spirit is a portion—an amsa. Avathara then is the Iswara of our system; the Avathara also, is the Iswara of the human spirit ; and as we see him in these two presentments, the light shines out and we begin to understand.

Let us take the historical drama, the setting of the great teaching. India had passed through a long cycle of great-

ness, of prosperity. Sree Ramachandra has ruled over the land as the model of the Divine Kingship that guides, shapes, and teaches an infant civilisation That day had passed. Others had come, feebler to rule and guide, and many a conflict had taken place. The great Kshathriya caste had been cut down almost to the root by the Avathara, Parasu Rama, Rama of the axe; it had again grown up strong and vigorous. Into that India the new manifestation came.

In that part of her story, this first offshoot of the great Aryan Race had settled in the northern parts of India It had there served as the model, the world-model, for a nation. That was its function. A religion, embracing the heights and depths of human thought, able to reach the ryot in his field, able to teach the philosopher and the metaphysician in his secluded study, a world-embracing religion, had been proclaimed through the lips of the Rishis of this first offshoot of the Race. Not only a religion, but also a polity, an economic and social order, planned by the wisdom of a Manu, ruled at first by that Manu himself. Not only a religion and a polity, but also the shaping of the individual life on the wisest lines—the successive Varnas, the successive Asramas, the stages of life, in the long life of the individual, were marked in the castes, and each caste-life of the embodied Jeevathma reproduced in its main principles, in the individual life, the Asramas through which a man passed between birth and death. Thus perfectly thought out, thus marvellously planned, this infant civilisation was given to the race as a world-model, to show what might be done where Wisdom ruled and Love inspired.

The word spoken out by that ancient model was the word Dharma—Duty, Fitness, Right Order.—*Hints on the Study of Bhagavad-Geetha*, pp. 6—12.

The Ramayana of Valmeeki "is a romance and it is not a romance. It is a truth for those who can comprehend it, and an extravagance for those who cannot."

Out of the vast mass of events in the history of the world, the Guardians of Humanity select only such as are best suited to their purpose and weave around them narratives that stand as eternal symbols of cosmic processes.

To the man of facts and dates, coins and inscriptions, I would recommend the advice given by Tennyson's Ancient Sage to the rationalistic young man.

> "The days and hours are ever glancing by,
> And seem to flicker past thro' sun and shade,
> Or short, or long, as Pleasure leads, or Pain,
> But with the Nameless is nor Day nor Hour,
> Tho' we, thin minds, who creep from thought to thought,
> Break into 'Thens' and 'Whens' the Eternal Now
> This double seeming of the single world!—"

To the sceptic, cased in the impenetrable armour of doubt and disbelief, owning no world outside the perception of his unerring senses, who wants to prove everything by the touchstone of *his* reason before he would deign to allow it a place in his Hall of Knowledge, I say with the Sage that :—

> "Thou canst not prove the Nameless, O my son,
> Nor canst thou prove the world thou movest in,
> Thou canst not prove that thou art body alone,
> Nor canst thou prove that thou art spirit alone,
> Nor canst thou prove that thou art both in one
> Thou canst not prove thou art immortal, no
> Nor yet that thou art mortal—nay, my son,
> Thou canst not prove that I, who speak with thee,
> Am not thyself in converse with thyself,
> For nothing worthy proving can be proven,
> Nor yet disproven, wherefore thou be wise,
> Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt,
> And cling to Faith beyond the forms of Faith!
> She reels not in the storm of waving words,
> She brightens at the clash of 'Yes' and 'No,'
> She sees the Best that glimmers thro' the Worst,
> She feels the Sun is hid but for a night

She spies the summer thro' the winter bud,
She tastes the fruit before the blossom falls,
She hears the lark within the songless egg,
She finds the fountain where they wail'd 'Mirage'!"

But, to him who would pierce thro' the exoteric narrative down to the bed-rock of Truth, out of which bubbles ever the Waters of Immortality and Omniscience, to him who would feel the heart-throb of Valmeeki, to him who would understand the mystery of the Divine Incarnation and its sublime purpose, I say :—

"If thou wouldst hear the Nameless, and wilt dive
Into the Temple-cave of thine own self,
There brooding by the central altar, thou
Mayst haply learn the Nameless hath a voice,
By which thou wilt abide, if thou be wise,
As if thou knewest, tho' thou canst not know ,
For Knowledge is the swallow on the lake
That sees and stirs the surface--shadow there,
But never yet hath dipt into the abysm,
The Abysm of all Abysms, beneath, within
The blue of sky and sea, the green of earth,
And in the million millionth of a grain
Which cleft and cleft again for ever more,
And ever vanishing, never vanishes,
To me, my son, more mystic than myself,
Or even than the Nameless is to me
And when thou sendest thy free soul thro' heaven,
Nor understandest bound nor boundlessness,
Thou seest the Nameless of the hundred names."

For, saith the Lord. "He who thus knoweth my divine birth and action in its essence, having abandoned the body. cometh not into birth again, but cometh unto me, O, Arjuna!"—*Geetha* IV, 9.

I have tried my best to be faithful to the original in word and in sentiment wherever it was possible. I have tried to place before his readers the thought that underlay the words of the poet. I have tried to preserve, as far as I could, the force, the beauty and the spirit of the Ramayana, that it may arouse in the hearts of the readers the same sentiments, passions and feelings that well up in the hearts of a

Hindu audience, when it listens to its recital. I have incorporated into the translation of the text, wherever it was necessary, the explanations and the comments of Govindaraja and the other authoritative commentators; but, where they differed or supplemented one another, I have given the essence of their opinions in the form of Notes. I have drawn from all available sources of information, the Hindi version of Thulasi Das, the Prakrith of Hemachandracharya, the Vedas, the Smrithis, the Puranas, the Darsanas, in fact, the whole range of Samskritha and other literature, as far as was accessible to me. I know that any one who undertakes the translation into English of such colossal works as the Ramayana or the Mahabharatha must have at his disposal a large and well-represented library; I know also that I have neither the means nor the influence to possess it. But, I take this opportunity to render my heart-felt thanks, full and over-flowing, to all such as have helped me by placing their books at my disposal, more especially to the Brahma Vidya Lodge, T.S. Kumbakonam. I know that this enterprise requires a large initial outlay of capital and that I have it not Babu Pratap Chandra Roy, the brave translator of the Mahabharatha, appealed and with success to the various Governments of India, Europe, and America; Mr. Manmath Nath Dutt, the first translator of the Ramayana into English prose, was favoured with the royal support of His Highness the Maharaja of Travancore, to whom he dedicated his work.

But my mainstay and support is Sree Ramachandra, whose greatness and glory I humbly endeavour to bring home to the hearts of the millions in the East and in the West. To Him I dedicate, in all humility and reverence, my unworthy production—to Him, to Seetha, to Lakshmana, to Bharatha, to Sathrughna and last, not least, to Maruthi, the Ideal Rama-bhaktha. In their never-failing grace do

I place my trust to enable me to carry on this work to its completion.

I know, better than others, the shortcomings of my work and of the numerous disqualifications I labour under to do my duty towards it ; and I humbly crave the indulgence of my readers, their sympathy, their support, their advice and their good thoughts.

C. R. SRINIVASA AIYANGAR, B.A.,
TRICHINOPOLY

INTRODUCTION

I :—" *The Ramayana.*"

"The record of the life and adventures of Sri Rama."

This expression is naturally applicable to all works that treat of Sri Rama , but custom and tradition have limited it to the grand epic of Valmiki.

Words are of three kinds :—*Rudhi*, used in a conventional sense ; *Yaugika*, derivative, retaining that signification which belongs to it by its etymology ; and *Yaugika Rudha*, having both an etymological and special meaning.

Such names as *Krishna* belong to the first class ; *Dasarathi*, the son of Dasaratha, is a type of the second ; *Pankaja*, the lotus, represent the third. The last word, etymologically understood, means "born in the mud ;" but other flowers such as the water-lily are not so called. It is confined by convention to the lotus alone. Even so the expression 'Ramayana' Many have sung 'the Life of Rama,' but convention restricts it by pre-eminence to the immortal epic of Valmiki alone. The Gita, the Brahma Sutras, The Maha Bhashya and Rama, are by conventional usage and tradition understood to mean respectively, The Bhagavad Gita, The Brahama Sutras of Vedavyasa, the Maha Bhashya of Patanjali and Rama the son of Dasaratha.

II .—' *The Original.*'

Brahma, the Ancient of Days, sent down Narada to instruct Valmiki in the mysteries of Divine wisdom. Vedic Hymns was the form in which the teaching was imparted. Later on, the Four-faced One came down even unto where Valmiki abode and endowed him with the Open Eye of the Seer. The sage saw with clear vision into the past, the present, and the future, and the record thereof was given to the world in the form of a grand poem of 100 crores of stanzas—*A. R Manohara Kanda* I; *A R. Yatra Kanda* I, *Adb. R.*, I.

Brahma sung the life of Rama in a poem of 100 crores of stanzas and taught it to Narada and the other Rishis of this world—*G. R., Bala Kanda, G in his preface to his 'Notes on Bala Kanda'*

It contains 9 lakhs of cantos, 900 lakhs of chapters and 100 crores of stanzas—*A. R. Manohara Kanda* 17.

In course of time, the holy sages received the inestimable gift and continued to recite the epic in their hermitages. Countless bands of the Shining Ones gathered overhead in their bright aerial cars and listened entranced to the heart-compelling strains, showers of heavenly flowers rained on the heads of the blessed singers; and shouts of joy and acclamation rent the skies. Then began a mighty struggle among the denizens of the other worlds as to who should have exclusive possession of the sacred epic. The Devas (Angels of Light) would have it in their bright homes on high; the Daityas (the Lords of Darkness) and the Nagas (Dragons of wisdom) would not rest until their nether worlds resounded with the holy chant; but the Sages and Kings of the earth would have parted with their lives sooner. Hot was the discussion between the excited claimants; Brahma the Creator, Siva the Destroyer tried in vain

to arbitrate ; in the end, they and the ambitious aspirants along with them proceeded by common consent to where the Lord Vishnu lay reclined on the folds of the Serpent of Eternity, gently lulled by the throbbing waves of the Ocean of milk. They laid the case before him and besought a way out of the difficulty. Vishnu cut the Gordian knot by dividing the huge work equally and impartially among the three claimants, who, they averred, were all entitled to it.

33 crores, 33 lakhs, 33 thousands, 333 stanzas and 10 letters formed the portion of each. Maha Lakshmi, the Consort of Vishnu, Sesha, the Serpent of Eternity, and Garuda, the divine Bird were initiated by the Lord into the three mighty Mantras (Spells) built up of the last 10 letters above mentioned. Lakshmi shared her knowledge with the Angels on high. Sesha instructed the Dragons and the Asuras in the Nether worlds. From Garuda came the knowledge of the mighty Mantra to the mortals of this Earth. What these mantras are and how they are to be utilised can best be learnt from the Science that treats of them (The Mantra Sastra). Thus proceeding, two letters remained undivided and indivisible. Siva requested that they might be his portion. The Holy Name that they expressed, *Rama*, was reverently received by the Lord of the Kailasa ; and for all time he abides at the holy Kasi (Benares), to whisper it into the right ear of those who exchange their mortal tenements for the Robe of Glory ; and it takes them over safely through the tossing waves of material existence on to the shores of the Regions of Light.

Thereafter, the portion of the Earth was further divided among the seven spheres thereof—Pushkara, Saka, Plaksha, Kusa, Krouncha, Salmali and Jambu. Each secured to itself 47,619,047 stanzas ; but 4 remained indivisible. Whereupon. Brahma the Creator begged hard of his father

to be allowed to receive it. Later on, Narada learnt them from him.

"I was before this Universe began and no other. Being and Not-Being are the Kosmic Ultimates; but beyond them and behind them *I remain.* All else shall pass away and change—all Name and Form; but, *I remain.* That which presents itself not as Truth, that which manifests itself not as the Self, verily that is Maya, the great Illusion cast upon the Supreme One like a mist, like a pall of darkness. The Great Elements permeate all Name and Form like warp and woof; but the Manifested and the Unmanifested live in Me and move and have their being. The Supreme is the Life and Light of the Universe; but for It, it is not. Know thou the above and you know Me". These are the Great Truths.

The inhabitants of the Pushkara Dweepa divided equally their share between the two Varshas (continents) that compose it; but the nine Varshas of our Jambu Dweepa received 5,291,005 stanzas each and a seven-lettered mantra.—Kuru, Hiranmaya, Ramyaka, Ketumala, Ilavrita, Bhadraswa, Hari, Kimpurusha and Bharata. But the letter 'Sri' that remained, was held in common by the nine Varshas.

Later on, the Lord took form as Veda-Vyasa; the Kaliyuga will see the Brahmanas dull of intellect and short-lived; so, he divided the one eternal Veda (Divine Wisdom) into many branches (Sakhas) to suit their varied capacities. Hence his name Veda-Vyasa, 'He that adjusts or arranges the Vedas'. Further, he took what fell to the Bharata Varsha as its share of the Original Ramayana and based upon it the 17 Puranas, the Upapuranas, and the Maha Bharata. But, his soul knew not peace nor serenity. He sat with an aching heart on the banks of the swift-flowing Sarasvati

when Narada came unto him and instructed him in the mysteries of the Self as contained in the four stanzas that constituted the Heart of all Wisdom. Veda-Vyasa assimilated it and embodied it in his famous Sri Bhagavatha, the child of his mature wisdom and fullness of peace.

The great sages, that later on gave to the world the various standard works on the Science of words, Astronomy, Astrology, Phonetics, Prosody, the Rules of Ritual and the Vedic glossaries, drew their materials from the Original Ramayana; and there is not an episode, that embodies any truth, moral, social, religious or philosophical, but owes its origin to the same.—*A. R. Yatra Kanda* II.

The Mahabharata has a similar mystery of i's own. Vyasa sung it of yore in 60 lakhs of stanzas, 30 of which he Angels kept to themselves; the Fathers appropriated 15; the Rakshasas and the Yakshas had to content themselves with 14; while we on this mortal earth were blessed but with the remaining lakh. Vaisampayana has preserved it for us. 24,000 stanzas make up the work, the numerous episodes excluded. But, there exists a compendium of the same in 150 stanzas and it is called the Anukramanika. —*M. B.*, I. 1.

III.—'*The Singer.*'

Maharshi Valmeeki is held to be the composer of the epic. The name means 'He who sprang out of the ant-hill.' Said Brahma, the Fashioner of the worlds, 'Know this mighty sage as Valmeeki, in as much he has come out of the Valmeeka (the ant-hill),"—*Brahma Kaivartha Purana.*

i. "I am the tenth son of Varuna, the Lord of the Waters (or the 10th in descent)"—*V. R.* VII. 96,19; "Thus was sung the Ramayana by the mighty son of Varuna; and Brahma signified his glad approval thereof"—*V. R.*, VII. 10.

All through the countless years, trees and shrubs sprang around him, while an immense ant-hill arose on all sides, completely concealing him from view. Later on, Varuna, the Lord of the Waters, sent down heavy rains, which dissolved the strange tenement ; coming out of it, the Gods hailed him as the son of Varuna, as Valmeeki.—*Go. on V. R.*—I. 1.

ii. He came of the line of Bhrigu, the son of Varuna. *V. R.*, VII., 94.

Riksha of the line of Bhrigu, was later on known as Valmeeki. He held the office of Veda-Vyasa in the 24th Chatur Yuga—*V. P.* III, 3.

iii. He is the son of Varuna and brother of Bhrigu—*Bh.*, IV. 1.

iv. He is the same as Riksha, the son of Prachetas of the line of Bhrigu—*V. R.* I. 1 (Go.) He abides in the world of Indra. *V. R.* VII. 71—11. ; M. B. II. 7.

v. Once upon a time, there lived on the shores of lake Pampa, a Brahmana, Sankha by name. Journeying through the pathless woods that covered the banks of the Godavari, a fierce-eyed hunter sprang at him and was not long in transferring to himself the clothes, the ornaments, the water pot and even the leathern sandals of the unfortunate Brahmana. It was midsummer and the sun was high in the heavens. His pitiless rays beat down upon the head of poor Sankha ; the red-hot sand burnt his tender feet to the very bone. He folded the rags that the cruel mercies of the hunter leftd him and stood upon them while the forest solitudes resounded with his screams of agony. The iron heart of the hunter grew soft towards him. " I did right" said he to himself "in depriving the poor fellow of what he had. It is but in the exercise of my duty and hereditary calling; but let me lay

by some small merit by giving him my old sandals." Sankha was profuse in his gratitude "May all good go with you! Verily, it is some good karma of a past life that put into your head the idea of making a present of a pair of sandals to a poor wayfarer and that, when he is in most need of it." The hunter was curiously affected with the prophetic words of the Brahmana. "Good sir! May I know what merit I have laid by in a former birth?" "Alas! replied Sankha, "the fierce sun almost melts my poor brains. My tongue cleaves to my mouth from dire thirst. Is this a place to dilate upon old-world stories? Take me to some cool shady spot where I may rest my poor limbs."

A ray of pity illuminated the dark recesses of the hunter's heart. Gently he led Sankha to the cool waters of a lake hard by; and the Brahmana plunged into its welcome depths, performed his midday prayers, offered due worship to the Gods, the Fathers and the Sages. Meanwhile, the hunter busied himself in providing his late victim with sweet fruits and roots; Sankha partook of them, and quenched his thirst at the limpid lake; then sought the leafy shade of a hospitable tree where the hunter followed him. "Now will I reveal unto you some glimpes of your chequered past" said Sankha.

"There lived of old a Brahmana, by name Stambha, of the clan of Sri Vatsa. In Sala town he abode and with him his beautiful wife Kantimayee, a model of wifely virtues and whole-hearted devotion; but, the wayward heart of the man turned away from her; and he so forgot himself, his manhood and the duty he owed to a lady and his wife, that he installed in his home a harlot, in whose witching smiles he lived. Outraged in everything that a woman holds dear and sacred, Kantimayee yet remained loyal to her unworthy husband; she was most assiduous in attending to the comforts of the man and

his paramour ; she anticipated their least wishes, supremely content if she could thereby win back her husband's love.

Years passed away thus ; and the wretch suffered the torments of Hell even before he reached it, in the shape of a cruel disease that made his days and nights one long agony. The woman who owned him body and soul, quietly robbed him of what wealth he had and sought another and more congenial companion of her pleasures. He came to know it and in his bitterness of his heart called down the deadliest curses upon the head of the betrayer and upon himself that so basely abused his wife's loyalty and love. " I stand alone in the world and helpless I have wilfully destroyed every chance of deserving any help from you or sympathy. My treatment of you was simply abominable. I placed the harlot in the sacred seat of the wedded wife ; I rejoiced to see the pure hands of my life's partner serve all meekly, the unclean animal I had taken to my heart. Cruel were my words to you and crueller my behaviour. The Holy Books tell us, that the husband who wrings the heart of his loyal wife is doomed to the miserable lot of a eunuch for ten lives and seven ; the finger of scorn will ever point at him. Now, the reed on which I lent has broken and pierced my heart." But Kantimayee lifted hands of appeal to him and cried, " Lord of my heart ! Your handmaiden is ever at your service. She is yours to command—now and ever. You shall not lack for any sympathy or service that my poor self can render. Strange it is that you should feel shame-faced to ask it of me. Never did the slightest shadow of resentment darken my heart against you. As for what you say of my cheerless life, do I not know that I only pay back what I owed in my former birth ? I made my bed and I must lie upon it. And when was a dutiful wife known to be otherwise than loyal and loving to her lord?"

Forthwith she sped to her parents and got from them the wherewithal to provide for his wants and necessities.

One hot day in June, Devala the sage crossed the threshhold of the humble pair and requested hospitality. Kantimayee turned to her husband and said 'This holy man is a master physician. I am sure that he will relieve you of your cruel disease, if he is so-minded'. Thus she played upon his intense selfishness and unconsciously persuaded him to welcome the sage. She washed his scorched feet with cool water, placed a seat for him, fanned his weary limbs ; and when he had rested a while, entertained him with the very best her humble abode afforded. The water that washed his feet she took to her husband and said "This is a very potent medicine and fails not" ; whereat, he eagerly drained it at a gulp.

At last, the disease ate into his vitals and he became delirious with pain she procured some medicine and was trying to force it into his mouth, when the man was seized with terrible convulsions and expired biting off finger of poor Kantimayee. She sold her ornaments and jewellery, bought fragrant wood with it, placed her unworthy husband upon it, set fire to the same and lay by his side in sweet content and supreme peace of heart. She took her place in the House of Glory.

But the dominating tendency of his life asserted itself at the last moment and of the harlot was his last thought. The wheel of Karma has turned and he is now a hunter— the natural foe of the birds of the air and the beasts of the forests *You* are no other than that renegade Brahmana. Your partner in iniquity is now born among the hunters and is your wife. Since you consented, unconsciously though, to welcome and entertain the Rishi Devala, a ray of pity, a flash of something noble crossed your dark heart and induced you to relieve my

sufferings and make a gift to me of your old shoes. The holy water that washed the feet of the sage has purified your unclean spirit; and you have been privileged to hear from me the details of your former life. In your last moments you bit off the finger of your faithful wife; now you live upon the flesh of slain beasts. You died in your bed ; and now the hard earth is your only bed. Nay, I will reveal to you what will befall you hereafter." He opened the eyes of the hunter to his next birth, instructed him in the right way of spending the holy month of Vaisakha. The hunter, now supremely repentant, gave back to his benefactor the articles of which he had dispossessed him and saw him safely out of the dark woods. The unexpected turn thus given to his life was productive of very favourable results.

Krinu, the sage, spent long years of severe austerities on the banks of a beautiful lake When it was over, his life essence streamed through his eyes ; a serpent swallowed it and the quondam hunter took birth in its womb. A Brahmana by birth, he was brought up by the rude hunters and took to their ways of living He mated with a woman of the lower classes and had many children through her. He organized a gang of foot-pads, waylaid the travellers and lived upon his ill-gotten gains.

One day, the Seven Sages chanced to pass through the forest. Our Brahmana hunter promptly held them up. "Reverend Sirs! None pass this way without paying me toll. Nay, it is but duty that I owe my wife and my young ones. So I request you to make a transfer of everything valuable you have." The Holy Ones smiled in pity and said, "My good man, please yourself. But do us a slight favour. Go home and put to your wife and children the following question —'You share with me the gains of my calling, do you not? Well ; doubtless you will take a share of the retribution natural to such a

life of lawlessness and cruelty as I lead.' Fear not, but we will remain here, even until you come back with their answer ; " and they bound themselves thereto by the most solemn oaths. The hunter could not clearly explain to himself what they were after. But such a simple request did not deserve to be refused. So he went home and put the question to his wife and children. But they laughed in his face and cried, "Are you gone mad? Who can deny that we have a right to a share of your earnings? But, as to a share of the results of your crimes, why, the very idea is supremely absurd."

The hunter was dazed with surprise at this outburst of frank selfishness. The holy presence of the Sages purified his nature and brought out its nobler instincts So, back he sped to where his strange visitors were. Tears of repentance and grief streamed down his rugged face as he clasped their feet and exclaimed in despair, " Lords of Compassion ! blind have I been till now ; a life of cruelty and iniquity did I lead, and went back upon the noble traditions of the Brahmanas, to whom I belong by birth. I have run through the entire gamut of crime. And now I take my refuge in your mercy. Extend the shadow of your protection over me." No other helper have I.

Then they took council among themselves. "Our poor friend is a Brahmana ; but he has chosen to degrade himself and lead a hunter's life. Yet, he seeks refuge of us ; and it behoves us to do something for him. Let us try upon him the effect of the all-potent Name of Sri Rama. He can have no better weapon to fight his past evil." They called him unto them and said, "My good man ! We instruct you in the mystery of a very powerful mantra. But, as you have a long course of purification to go through, you cannot receive it as it is; we shall reverse it for you. Meditate upon it with your heart and soul, day and night, till we come back."

They then whispered into his ears the syllables *Mara* and vanished from his sight.

The hunter planted his staff where they stood a moment ago and sat down there in all earnestness, in all sincerity, to meditate upon the mighty spell. Many thousands of years passed over his head. The world and all it held slipped away from his consciousness. His various bodies were gradually purified of everything gross and material and shone in their splendour and radiance. But there rose around him where he sat, a large ant-hill, that in course of time concealed him from view. The Sages were as good as their word. They came back to where their hunter-disciple sat, lost in profound meditation. " Come out into the living world " called they ; and he came out from the ant-hill. The Sages laid their hands on his head in sweet blessing and said, " Holy One ! The Name of the Lord has consumed your past sins. You have stood face to face with the Great Mystery. You are our equal. A second time were you born when you came out of yonder ant-hill. The world shall know you hence as Valmeeki (Son of the Ant-Hill). "

Thus did Valmeeki narrate the events of his former birth to Him whose life he sung.—*A. R. Rajya Kanda.* 14; *Ad. R.* II. 6 ; *Bhav.* P. III. 10.

Bhrigu and Valmeeki were the sons of Charshani and Varuna—*Bh.* VI. 10.

IV.—The Number of Stanzas.

The 7 cantos are divided into 500 chapters and 24,000 stanzas. (*V. R.* VII. 94). Govindaraja's commentary extends only to so many ; But, the actual number is 24,253. The commentator explains it thus :—

1. It is many thousands of years since the poem was sung. Innumerable versions of it would naturally have

arisen ; the carelessness of the later copyists might have also contributed to this irregularity.

2. It may be that Valmeeki set himself to sing the epic in 24,000 stanzas ; but, he was obliged to exceed the limit, more especially as it was sung and not written.

3. We ought to take it that 24,000 is the lowest limit. The work would not fall short of it.

4. The Day of Brahma comprises 1,000 Mahayugas. A Manvantara is 1/14 of it; but Amara Simha, in his Lexicon has it that it comprises 71 Mahayugas, ignoring the fractional portion. Even so, 24 is the nearest total number in thousands, the odd stanzas being ignored. But, as it stands, the South Indian edition in Grantha characters commented upon by Govindaraja contains:

Cantos.	Chapters.	Stanzas.
Balakanda	77	2,255
Ayodhyakanda	119	4,415
Aranyakanda	75	2,732
Kishkindhakanda	67	2,620
Sundarakanda	68	3,006
Yuddhakanda	131	5,990
Uttarakanda	110	3,234
	647	24,253

V—When was it sung?

Valmeeki composed this epic before Sri Rama celebrated his horse-sacrifice. Ravana and his brood had been wiped out.—*V. R.* I. 4.

Satrughna went to Mathura, killed Lavana in fair fight and ruled for over twelve years in his town. Returning to Ayodhya, he spent a night at the hermitage of Valmeeki ;

when he heard the grand epic sung by Kusa and Lava.— *V. R.* VII. 71.

" Whom shall I give it to " thought Valmeeki ; and it so chanced that the royal twins Kusa and Lava touched his feet and begged to be taught the sacred song.—*V. R.* I. 4.

So Valmeeki must have composed it when Rama held sway at Ayodhya and had put Sita away from himself.

" When the Tretayuga draws to its close and its successor the Dwapara takes its place, in that Twilight of Ages, I come down on earth as Sri Rama, son to Dasaratha, and lift the load of sin and sorrow from her shoulders."— ***M. B.*** *Santi Parva* III. 39

VI.—The Epic.

"*This* we should do ; *that* we should not. *This* secures to us happiness here and hereafter ; *that* plunges us in misery now and for ever. *This* is good for us ; *that* is not so." Now, no one denies that such discriminative knowledge is extremely desirable and useful to all that make the journey of life. The Holy Writ (Vedas), the World-histories (Puranas), and the sacred Epics (Kavyas) give us such knowledge, if we but get at their Heart-Doctrine. Every one of these go to develop in us the same faculty of Right Discrimination ; but, there is a difference in the process.

Now, the Holy Writ is almost kingly in its authority. There is no questioning it, no altering it. It must be taken as it is and must be obeyed to the very letter. You may not take out the word *Agni* in a Mantra and replace it by its synonym, say—*Vanhi*. Why ? The results predicated would not come about ; nay, evil, and that of no light kind will come out of it. " If a Mantra be not rendered aright in rhythm, intonation or accent, if the letters are misplaced or omitted, the results fail to appear ; and the fool would

have drawn down death upon himself. Behold! Thwashta sought to create one who *could slay* Indra. But, a slight change of accent and intonation made it to bring into existence one who *was killed* by Indra."—*Sruti.* We may not at present understand the results of each and every commandment; but we dare not disobev them; for it will bring forth evil. No one sits down to argue the orders of a general on the battle field or of a king on his throne; he does not analyse it, examine its legality, morality or philosophic fitness. Even so, study the Holy Writ with care, learn from it what to do and what to avoid. Follow the Right and keep away from the Path of Unrighteousness But, all this is primarily based on an unreasoned desire for happiness and fear of evil.

Now, the World-histories adopt a milder tone. They command not, but offer friendly advice. "This one did right and lived in happiness here and hereafter. This another chose the path of wickedness and came to grief and misery now and beyond." Thus we are led to conclude that Rama should be our ideal and not Ravana. This is the more pleasant way of learning the Rules of Life.

The Epic deals with the question in a different way. It is not the nature of women to wear their hearts on their lips; but, none the less, they obtain what they want—and very often more. Even so, the epics carry a meaning on their surface; but, there runs an under current of deep thought and instruction. Lovers of literature seek to pierce through the veil of words into that which lies beneath—the heart of the poet; and once found, it is a perennial source of joy. Hence, the epic is the best teacher of the three.

A perfect Epic is flawless in every way; it abounds in all excellences; it has a beauty all its own. Rightly has it been named "The child of the poet's heart."

There are three varieties of it. The Gadya Kavya (narrative prose) of which Kadambari is the type; the Padya Kavya (narrative poetry), represented by Raghuvamsa; the Champu (narrative prose and poetry), like the Bhojachampu.

Man has to hand countless materials that go to build up his Palace of Happiness; even so the Epic. The words and their connotations, these form its body; the Heart Doctrine is its breath of life; Metaphor, Simile, Hyperbole and the other Figures of Speech serve to adorn it gaily; puns, innuendos and the other inferred hints make up its list of personal excellences, bravery, fortitude, valour and the like. Vaidarbhi and the other varieties of diction are its generic attributes and ennoble it. Kaisiki and the other modes of style are its graceful motions. The harmonious arrangement of words is known as the Sayya, the soft bed on which it reclines at ease. Fire brings out the sweetness of objects and distil for us their essences; even so the Pakas, the various Modes of composition. These are the ingredients that heighten the beauty of the Epic.

Words fall into three clsses :—

Vachaka, Lakshaka and Vyanjaka; likewise their meanings. The Vachya represents the connotation as laid down in authoritative lexicons. The philosophers hold that the primal words were assigned their respective significance by the Divine Being. The Lakshya seeks an allied and derivative signification where the first fails to be appropriate. The Vyangya comes to light when the words have been arranged in their grammatical order and have expressed their natural meaning; it is apart from the above and renders it more graceful and charming. Dhvani is another name for it.

There are numerous Figures of Speech, chief amongst which are a hundred. These do not belie the name given them of Alamkara (ornamentation). From Slesha (the

puṇ), to Gathi (the way), there are 24 Gunas (attributes) that go to make up the character of the Epic. These are to be found in the arrangement of the words themselves.

Reeti (Diction):—this excellent choice of words is divided into,

Vaidarbhi—difficult word-joinings, harsh letters and long compounds, find no place in it.

Gaudi—long and tedious compounds characterise it and harsh letter.s

Panchali—a happy combination of the above.

Vritti (Style)·—the words and the sense aptly render the varying emotions. This is of four kinds.—

Kaisiki—reflecting the higher emotions of Love and Pathos.

Arabhati—painting the Wonderful, the Humourous and the Serene

Satvati—picturing to us the Heroic and the Dreadful.

Bharati—wherein the Terrible and the Repulsive find a voice.

Sayya —the words must be so arranged that their relations might not be far-fetched.

Paka:—unripe fruits are wrapped up in straw or otherwise subjected to the influence of heat to make them soft and mellow.

The nobility and grandeur of composition gives a beauty and charm to the emotions of the heart.

Draksha Paka (the Grape) · The grape requires not much effort to make it yield its sweet juice; so, the piece charms us with its manifold graces even while we read it.

Nalikera Paka (the Cocoanut) You have to painfully remove its hard rind, break through the shell, get at the nut and even then, you have to chew it soft before you enjoy its refreshing juice. Even so, the Epic does not

easily surrender itself to you in all its beauty, but puts you through the veritable Labours of Hercules before it rewards you.

The *grape* melts in your mouth ; the *cocoanut* is hard to crack Between these are found the *Madhu* (the Honey) the *Ksheera* (the Milk),the *Kadali* (the Plantain), and the like.

The Epic Inferior has no Dhvani to boast of, but the superficial graces of words and their natural meanings. 'Chitra' is another name for it.

The Epic Middling —the natural meaning preponderates while the Dhvani peeps in now and then.

The Epic Superior —the Dhvani is essentially conspicuous and graces the words and their natural significance. Towns, the ocean, mountains, seasons, moonlight, sunrise, pleasant recreations in charming groves, aquatic sports, carousals, love-making, pangs of separation, wedding, birth of a son, councils of state, gambling, military expeditions, battles and the happy times of the hero have each a chapter or more devoted to them. Various feelings and emotions that sway the human heart find perfect expression. The chapters are not long and tedious. The metres used in them are sweet to the ear. Each chapter varies the metre at its close.

This is the Epic Perfect ; and the Ramayana of Valmeeki is its best exponent.

Such a work is a source of joy to us in this world and in the other. "An Epic brings us fame, wealth and worldly wisdom ; it keeps our feet from the Path of Evil ; it needs but be studied to charm ; it ever counsels us aright like a true love."—*Kavya Prakasa.*

"Who will say that the study of noble Epics destroys not the dark brood of sin and evil in us ? Whom does it not

charm ? Whom does it not save from the wiles of wrong?"—*King Bhoja*.

The Maha Kavya, the Grand Epic.

The Hero ennobles the Epic. His very name drives away from us the Things of Darkness, and gathers round us the sweet Angels of good. Such a one must be sung of by it.—*Bhamahacharya*

"The Mount Meru towers aloft in greatness and grandeur ; but the Tree of Plenty (Kalpaka) makes it more charming and graceful Figures of Speech, Style, Diction, and Modes do beautify the Epic. But the perfect Hero is its crest-jewel."—*Udbhatacharya*

"An Epic owes its life and fame to its noble Hero."—*Rudra Bhatta*.

"The Hero's noble attributes hold together the poet's word-gems that shine for all time around the necks of the lovers of literature."—*Sahitya Meemamsa*.

The poet may be modest of speech and his attainments of no very high order ; but his choice of a Hero compels the attention of the most fastidious—*King Bhoja*.

Else, the wise pay no great heed to them.

The Maha Bharata lives for ever in the hearts of men, only because the Lord Sree Krishna forms its central figure and hero.

The Science of Reasoning finds a place in the life of the Great One, since it affords analogical evidence and inference that the Lord is the instrumental and material cause of the universe.

The Science of Ritual is also useful in this way. One should learn the Holy Writ first and then alone proceed to inquire into the nature of the various Rules of Life laid down therein ; so begins the teaching. It sets itself to bring home to our hearts the Divine attributes and excellences. It is the hand-maiden of the Royal Science of Self,

The Vedanta, the Science of the Absolute, leads us to the feet of the Supreme One by holding up for our veneration and ideal His countless perfections.

Q. The Monists hold that the Absolute has no attributes. How then can the Science deal with the same? How then can Vedanta profess to expound to us the nature and attributes of Brahman?

A. Though some passages deny any attributes to It, we can yet postulate that the absence of imperfection is perfection. Or, we predicate attributes of It in Its conditioned and manifested aspect. Hence, Sciences and World-histories find a place in the estimation of the Wise and attain deathless fame, in so far as they contribute to unfold to human minds the glory of the Great One.

The Ramayana of Valmeeki is the oldest Epic in the world; and it bids fair to rule the hearts of men to the very end of Time.

He who sung it is throned aloft in the Temple of Fame. And why? Sree Rama, the Supreme One, is the Hero of his immortal poem. He is the noblest of the noble. His Name dispels the Things of Gloom and Darkness and Evil. All excellences find their perfect expression in him. "He who hath not drunk of the beauty of Rama's presence, he upon whom the benign glances of Rama have not rested, even for a while, the world throws him out as a thing peculiarly vile; nay, his very self scorns him."—*V. R.* II. 17.

Of a truth, it is but a waste of time and labour to study poems that come not up to the above level.

The Hero

Fame and valour are his; the Aims of Life lie next his heart; round him centre the chief events; in him shine forth all heroic qualities; and he alone enjoys the supreme good that the poem holds out.

The Hero must exemplify in himself the following :—

1. High birth (*V. R.* II. 1).

2. His natural beauty, though unadorned, should captivate the hearts of the beholders, even as though it was adorned to perfection.

3. He must hold his head higher than any other ruler of men and should bow to no other.

4. His munificence and generosity must quite overwhelm those that seek him.

5. The grandeur of his presence must illuminate the world, even like the noon-day sun.

6. A right adaptation of means to ends, a marvellous perception, almost intuitive, of the when, the where, and the how, of human actions.

7. A heart ever wedded to the Great Law (*V. R.* II. 2).

8. Divine origin (*V. R.* II. 1).

9. A perfect knowledge and mastery of all the knowledge of his time (V. R. II. 2).

10. Supreme simplicity and unassumingness.

The *Hero* is of four kinds —

1. *Dhirodatta.* Joy and sorrow, anger and grief have power to move him not. Deep is his heart beyond ken, even when overwhelming emotions would lay bare its profundity. He would not see any one, man or beast, in pain or grief, but would at once devote himself to relieve it. He is remarkable by the almost utter absence of self. He sees through the Eye of Wisdom and listens through the Ear of Experience. The Heroic emotions dominate in him.

(2) *Dhiroddhata.* Proud and jealous, he is a man of impulses. Of fierce deeds, he boasts of them and of himself, whenever the mood is on him. His knowledge of things enable him to make others see and hear and feel

what he likes. Quick to feel and ready to revenge, the Terrible characterises him.

(3) *Dhira Santa*. Of infinite patience, all griefs touch him and vanish. He has ever a smile and a gentle word for all. The Serene finds its expression in him ; and he is a Brahmana as a rule.

(4) *Dhira Lalita*. He leaves the cares of state and its control to his sons or his ministers. The gentler and finer arts of life occupy his time and attention. A happy life and a quiet is what he aims after. The emotion of Love is the key-stone of his character.

The Rasas (Emotions).

A modification of mental consciousness brought into existence through

(1) *Vibhava* —Youth, beauty, intelligence, the moon-light, the southern zephyr, the spring, the flowers, the joyous notes of birds and the like (*V. R.* IV. 1.)

(2) *Anubhava* —The witching glances of women, the play of their eye-brows, and the like.

(3) *Satvika* —Utter sympathy with others, even to the extent of experiencing in himself their joys and sorrows; and

(4) *Sanchari* :—The minor emotions, 32 in number, from Dispassion to Anxiety.

Nine are the *Rasas*, the flashes that play over the dark waters of the human heart—Love, Humour, Pathos, the Terrible, the Heroic, Fear, the Repulsive, Wonder and Serenity. Man and woman are moved strangely by each other ; and this is known as Sthayi Bhava, varying with everyone of the above emotions. But, till it developes into any one of these, the others should not dominate it ; the modifying causes, mentioned above, Vibhava and the like, should nourish it and give it an independent existence as a *Rasa*. Man loses himself in the experience of

it. (The above is a very superficial mention of the chief varieties ; but, the reader may profitably consult Dasa Rupaka and other works on Rhetoric).

Love, Valour, the Terrible, the Wonderful and the Serene ought to find a place in any narration of the life of the Hero.

If the above are in any way unsuited to the Hero-type selected ; or if the Hero and the Heroine are wanting in mutual and perfect love ; or if the love of the Heroine stands higher than that of the Hero , or it animals, birds and savages form the subject of narration or description, it is a Perversion of Emotion.

In the Ramayana, Love and the other Emotions find apt and perfect expression. Rama takes Seeta to wife and lives happily with her in his father's capital for many years. The course of true love runs smooth here. Ravana kidnaps her, and then we have a fine description of the miseries of separated lovers. The episode of Surpanakha is a fine touch of humour. Dasaratha pines away of sorrow, having lost, through his own folly, the son of his heart, Pathos, supreme and touching, characterises the entire scene. Lakshmana's deeds of valour illustrate the Heroic in man. Ravana and his impious brood, with their cruelties, their savage grandeur and their unbounded might, voice forth the Terrible. The incident of Mareecha and his kin is a fine picture of the Fearful. Kabandha, Viradha and their fellow-monsters, appropriate to themselves the Repulsive. Wonderful past belief are the deeds of battle and might of Ravana, Indrajit, Kumbhakarna and the like ; and Sabari, the woman-saint, embodies the Serene in her noble life. But, Love in its myriad aspects dominates the epic throughout ; the other emotions are but auxiliary. Some hold that the epic is titled ' The Fall of Ravana ' and that the Heroic is the master-emotion, while the others are but secondary. Others contend

that Valmeeki named his grand-work the *Seetacharitra* and Grief forms the key-note of the whole, while the others are its complements.

The Heroine.

She partakes to a very great extent of the excellent characteristics of the Hero, in so far as they are applicable to women. Her very name must be a Word of Power to keep away evil and attract the Angels of Light. (For a fuller description of the heroine and her innumerable varieties, Dasa Rupaka and other standard works on the Poetics may be consulted).

VI.—*The Aims of Life.*

"An Ithihasa should take as its subject some famous episode of the Past ; it should lead us to the realisation of Virtue, Wealth, Love and Beatitude" says the *Sabdasthoma.* The only World-records that come up to the mark are the Ramayana of Valmeeki, the Mahabharata of Vedavyasa and the Samhita of Gargacharya.

Valmeeki divides his grand epic into the *Purvakanda,* narrating the life and adventures of Sree Rama, the Divine Incarnation ; and the *Uttarakanda,* where Vasishtha initiates Sree Rama into the Science of Brahman. The former inculcates virtue, wealth and love , the latter forms the Light on the Path of Perfection.

Virtue consists in the proper discharge of duties that are consonant to the Holy Books, that do not militate against the Right, and that mark the stage of Evolution the Jeeva has reached.

Wealth is the acquisition and the enjoyment of the goods of this world, power, place, fame, authority, influence and the like.

Love is the master-passion that draws man and woman to one another.

Now, Valmeeki has utilised the various incidents in his epic to exemplify the workings of the above. A father's word is a law to the son; to discharge it to his very best is his duty; right or wrong, pregnant with weal or woe, he may not stop to consider; and Rama renounced, with a glad heart, the mighty empire that was his by right and exiled himself to the lonely woods.

Brotherly love, almost ideal, and the attitude of the youngers towards the eldest, no where finds more touching expression than in the relations of Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata, and Satrughna to one another.

A wife's place is ever by the side of her husband. Sunshine or rain, joy or sorrow, pleasure or pain, she should ever share it with him; and Seeta is the ideal wife for all time.

Sages, hermits, and holy men form the life and soul of a people; and a king's highest duty consists in seeing that they want for nothing and are protected against everything that might interfere with the proper discharge of their noble trust. Rama passed his word to the saints of Dandaka and laid low Viradha, Kabandha, Ravana and the other workers of evil.

Kings and Emperors in the pride of their power and might, are as nothing before the spiritual glory of a Brahmana; the superhuman efforts of Visvamithra and the humble reverence paid by Sree Rama, the Divine king, to the pure and the holy Ones are a lesson for all mankind.

Strength and power, wealth and valour far above the human, and fierce embattled hosts countless as the sands of the ocean, are as nothing, if the possessor thereof turns away from the Path of Right to work evil upon the good and the wise and uproot the foundations of Law and Justice; and the dreadful fate that overtook Ravana and the millions that owned his sway, is a warning not to be despised.

Virtue ever outweighs wealth in the estimation of the good ; Rama gave up, with a joyful heart, the kingdom of the Ikshvakus and the wealth of the earth.

Any service rendered to us, be it the slightest, should ever bear fruit in us, even like the seed of the spreading banyan. Jatayu, the Vulture-King, defended Seeta with his life; and Rama, the incarnation of the Divine, rendered unto him the last offices and passed him on to the Worlds of Light.

Sugreeva offered him his friendship, consolation and help, when Rama wandered, heavy of heart and sore of foot, in the frightful solitudes of Dandaka ; he preserved for him the ornaments that Seeta threw down to him when she was spirited away by Ravana , in return, Rama gave him back his wife and a kingdom along with her.

Vibheeshana, sore afflicted and pierced to the heart by the cruel words of his brother, sought refuge with Rama ; length of life beyond that of mortals and unbounded sway over the Rakshasas of the world were his reward.

Love should be ever in consonance with Virtue and Law ; else, it is sweet poison. Dasaratha laid his manhood at the feet of the imperious Kaikeyi, exiled his noble son to the dreadful forests even in the prime of his youth ; and—the slave of Love paid for it with his life. Rama yielded to the importunities of Seeta to chase the golden deer and—lost her. Vali deprived his brother of his wife, all unjustly and in hasty wrath, and—his life was the forfeit. Ravana laid violent hands on Seeta and—doomed himself to destruction, root and branch.

True it is there are only some episodes in it that place our feet on the Path of Liberation ; but, the mystery of Man, the Universe and the Absolute, the various Paths that lead to It do not find a prominent place in it. The Uttarakanda or as it is better known, the Vasishtha Ramayana, deals with it in its entirety. The Poorvakanda was taught to the royal

youths Kusa and Lava ; and the Science of Self may not be properly expounded therein. It is divided into six cantos of 24,000 stanzas; the sixth is further divided into the Poorva (Yuddha) and the Uttarakandas. The spiritual teachings in the Ramayana are given by Valmeeki to Bharadwaja. It is a monumental work by itself. It is arranged into six Kandas of 32,000 stanzas, the last canto being divided into the Poorva and the Uttara. It is more popularly known as Gnana Vasishtha Ramayana and the Yoga Vasishtha Ramayana. There are no grounds to class this among the minor Puranas, as some have done.

VII. *Its divine origin.*

The Almighty Father sat on His Throne of Glory in the highest heavens. His consorts—Sree, Boomi and Neela (Divine Energies)—graced His side. The Angels of Light and the Emancipated Souls thronged the Divine Presence, singing His glories. But, the Lord's look was far away, to where His children groped in darkness on this mortal earth. "Ah me, the pity of it! they are as well entitled to be in my presence as any of these , but, they will not. As the grains of gold in the ball of wax, they are swirled among the waves of Matter and are lost." And out of the depths of His infinite compassion towards those poor souls ever bound to the Wheel of Time, He provided vehicles of manifestation to them, that might dedicate them to His service and thereby reach His feet. Yet, they *would* not be saved. A poor wretch was wringing his hands in despair on the banks of a torrent roaring in its flood. A kind soul took pity on him and gave him a boat well-furnished, saying, " My good man ! weep not. Take this boat of mine, and cross over to yonder bank swiftly and in safety." The poor wretch was profuse in his thanks ; he jumped into the boat and set her head against the current. But, alas ! when he was on the safe

side of the stream, his evil genius put it into his head to go along with the current, to where the river shattered itself to pieces over a sheer wall of rock and lost itself in the abyss below. Even so, the children for whom His heart bled misused the means of salvation so mercifully furnished them and were engulfed in the Quicksands of Pleasure. Then the Lord said to Himself, "Poor things! they have no means of following the Right and keeping away from the Wrong"; and He gave them His commandments--*The Vedas.*

Yet, his children *would* not be saved. They failed to construe the Holy Books aright; they misunderstood it; they perverted its purpose. Then, like a king who sets out to reclaim his rebellious subjects by the might of his presence, He chose to come down from his Worlds of Light down to this dark dull Earth and resolved to take birth as Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata, and Satrughna; for, Example is better than Precept. The king sets the pace and his subjects do but follow him. Meanwhile, Brahma and the bright Gods had sought his protection from the terrible Rakshasas that hung like a pall of darkness over the worlds. Dasaratha had gone through untold austerities to have the privilege of being His earthly father. Further, has he not promised to all beings, "I come down among you in every cycle to lay low the wicked, exalt the righteous and to restore the Great Law.' As Rama, he rid the worlds of Ravana and was a type of filial duty. As Lakshmana, he killed Indrajit and lived out a life of sweet service to the Lord. As Bharata, he destroyed the wicked Gandharvas and made his life a touching lesson of supreme surrender to the Lord; and as Satrughna, he rid the earth of Lavana and illustrated in his life the noble doctrine of absolute service to the Lord's Elect.

Brahma, the Fashioner of the Worlds, ever intent upon the welfare of all beings, thought it a duty and a privilege to preserve for all time the grand Truths so taught

and so lived. He sung the Life of Sree Rama, in 100 crores of stanzas ; Narada and the other sages of the Brahmaloka learnt it from him. Meanwhile, Brahma cast about for some pure and devoted soul through whom the message could be conveyed to the sons of men. Valmeeki, purified by centuries of devout meditation upon Sree Rama, and of recitation of his Holy Name, shone brightest among the mortals. And to him so nobly qualified for the task, he sent his son Narada. "Valmeeki received from Narada the life of Rama sung at great length by Brahma." (*Matsya Purana*). It dispelled for ever the doubts and questionings under which Valmeeki's soul had been labouring. The veil was lifted from the face of the Great Mystery. Brahma gave him the Open Eye of the Seer ; and the result was the grandest and the best epic poem in the world—even Ramayana, that forms the key to the heart-doctrine of the Vedas (*Go.'s* Preface to his commentary upon the Ramayana).

VIII.—*It is an Exposition of the Gayathri.*

Parabrahman the Absolute, is the Alpha and the Omega. The Pranava or the Word of Power, tries to convey to the universe the Triple Mystery, the Three in One and the One in Three. The Gayathri is an amplification, though faint, of the Word. It is the quintessence of the Vedas, the germ out of which they evolved. Of the 7 crores of Words of Power, it is the mightiest. The twice-born Brahmanas, Kshathriyas and Vaisyas meditate upon its countless mysteries when the Sun, the symbol of Life and Light, rises, when he stands high in the heavens and when he kisses his bride on the threshold of the west. It is the only means to secure the Aims of Life.

Now, wonderful to behold ! every thousand stanzas in

the Ramayana begin with one of the letters of the Gayathri. Hence, the Ramayana is something more than an epic poem; something higher than a work of art.

Cantos	Chapters	Stanzas	Thousands
Bala	1	1	1,000
,,	30	17	2,000
,,	63	3	3,000
Ayodhya	14	37	4,000
,,	44	5	5,000
,,	71	33	6,000
,,	99	25	7,000
Aranya	12	4	8,000
,,	47	10	9,000
Kishkindha	4	3	10,000
,,	31	1	11,000
,,	67	50	12,000
Sundara	27	14	13,000
,,	46	9	14,000
,,	68	29	15,000
Yuddha	28	26	16,000
,,	50	40	17,000
,,	68	1	18,000
,,	80	43	19,000
,,	112	26	20,000
,,	131	20	21,000
Uttara	22	8	22,000
,,	40	29	23,000
,,	77	27	24,000

IX.—'*The Inner Meaning.*'

"The Puranas and the Ithihasas unlock the mysteries of the Vedas" say the wise. Ramayana should, in consequence, deal with the problems of Life and Being.

"From whom does this universe derive its existence? In whom does it live and have its being? To whom does it

go back when its purpose has been served? It it Parabrahman " (Taiththareeya Upanishad). " But what is Is to us, Brahma, the Ancient of Days? Vishnu, the Presever? Rudra, the Destroyer ?" Valmeeki's opening lines voice forth the same query. " Who is he that embodies in himself all these manifold excellences?" " Sree Rama" replies Narada. And at the end of the Poem, Brahma reiterates the same Truth. "In the beginning Thou wert; later on I was begotten of Thee. The whole universe was latent in Thee. Over the Great Waters Thou didst brood. The lotus came out of Thy navel; and on it I was. Thou didst ordain me as the Fashioner of Forms.—*V. R.* VII. 104.

The poet touches upon this point more than once in the course of the poem. " Meanwhile Maha Vishnu, the Lord of the Universe, manifested himself unto them, in His supreme glory. The Conch, the Wheel and the Mace graced His hands. The graceful folds of His vesture flashed as lightning through a storm-cloud"— do. I. 15. He is the Refuge of all, " Lord of Might, Terror of Foes! Thou art our sole Refuge"—do.

All creation lifts its voice on high, in praise of Him and Him alone; " Then the Gods, the Sages, the Rudras, the Gandharvas and the Apsarasas sang high the praises of the Lord in strains of noble melody."—do.

He is the Great One. Tapas alone can open our eye to His glory; " I know the mystery of Rama, the Great One, whose will is omnipotent. Vasishtha and the other sages here know it too, for, illimitable is their knowledge and power." (I. 19). "This Great Being shines resplendant beyond Darkness" (*Purusha Sooktha*). " The Brahmanas know Him through the teachings of the Vedas, through renunciation, through immortal Tapas." (Sruthi).

He is the Causeless Cause; "Brahma, the Fashioner," came out of the Unmanifested." (I. 70).

He is higher than the highest: " Then the Gods and the Sages knew that He was the mightier." (I. 75).

He is Time and Boundless Duration; " The Gods prayed to Him for deliverance from Ravana, whose hand lay heavy upon the worlds; and the Lord of Time, Maha Vishnu, came down unto the Earth" (II. 1).

He is the Eternal Light and pervades all; " From the Unmanifested came Brahma, Eternal, all-knowing and all-powerful. (II. 110).

Inconceivable is His might; " No limit do I see to the power of Him, whom Seetha, the child of Janaka, owns as her Lord." (III. 38).

All excellences attain their perfect expression in Him.—Being, Consciousness and Bliss. " Thou art the goal of the good; Thou art the sole refuge of the miserable; Thou art the balm that healeth the wounds of sorrow; Thou art fame; Thou knowest all things great and small; Thou art the model of filial duty; Thou art the Unknowable, the Unattainable; Thou dost transcend the senses; Thou teachest by example the highest Law; Thy Name is engraved on the face of Eternity; Thou art the head and foundation of knowledge and wisdom; Thou art gentle and patient, even as Mother Earth; Thy eyes are lovely as the fresh-blown petals of the red-lotus." (IV. 15-22).

He is the Great Destroyer. " The self-born One, the Ancient of Days, the four-faced Brahma; the Destroyer of the Asuras of the Three Cities, the three-eyed Rudra; and the lord of the Celestials, Indra, dare not come between Rama and the object of his righteous wrath. (V. 51).

The source of Form and Name, countless are His manifestations; " I have heard it say that Maha Vishnu is higher than the highest, is the One, the Unmanifested,

endless and beyond thought and speech. Has He taken form as this monkey and come down among us to work our destruction ?" (V. 54).

Q. "In the beginning was Hiranyagarbha"; "Darkness was not, nor day, nor night; Being was not, nor Non-being. It alone was." "Indra took countless forms through his power of illusion." Such Vedic texts lead us to conclude that Brahma, Rudra, Indra and such like may well be the cause of the universe.

A. "This great Yogi (Adept) is the Supreme Self, eternal, without beginning, middle or end. He is beyond Darkness, beyond the Mahat (the Great Element). There is none higher than He. He is the stay of the universe and its support. The divine weapons grace His hands. On His broad breast shines Sreevathsa, the mole. Mahalakshmi is his inseparable partner. He is invincible, immortal and eternal."

The above passage teaches us that He is the Supreme and no other. Be-ness, Self and similar expressions do but denote Him; and Brahma, Siva, Indra and every other name is His. He is the highest Self. He is the Lord of matter and wisdom. He is Narayana; "Thou art Narayana; Thou art the eternal consort of the Divine Mother; Thou art omnipresent; Thou art the Great Boar with a single horn; Thou art the slayer of the wicked, past, present and future." (VI. 120).

Q. "The Gods regarded Vishnu as the higher." But we need not take that it was his natural position; but one acquired by Thapas from Siva.

A. Then, Rudra had no reason to be angry; but, we read that he was consumed with wrath when he handed over his bow. Besides, we read that he had no place of worship in Agasthya's House of Gods; nor was he regarded

as an object of worship. " Brahma, Vishnu, Agni, Indra, Soorya, Chandra, Baga, Kubera and others had their altars of worship." (III. 13).

Q. Why not take it that the above Beings came down to render worship to him ? Rudra, as the highest, does not naturally find mention along with them ; for, we read " Here do Gods, Gandharvas, Siddhas and Sages repair to offer their respects to Agasthya." (do. 11.)

A. Not so ; the passage refers to the Celestials of the heavenly world, and not to Brahma or Vishnu. Besides, we erect places of worship to enshrine the Gods we bow to ; not that the Gods come down there to pay reverence to us. Moreover, Paramasiva was not invited to partake of the offerings during the sacrifice of Daksha. He is not an object of worship to be placed on the same level as the Lord Vishnu ; else, he would have found a place in Agasthya's temple. Salvation is in the hands of the Supreme One ; and who is it but Sree Rama, whose grace lifted Jatayu to the Worlds of Light ? Hence, the Ramayana teaches us that Maha Vishnu is the supreme Brahman, whom we perceive through his Holy Writ. " Listen to me, while I speak to the thousands assembled here. This poem that sings of your life and deeds, is the best and the grandest of all. This epic that unfolds your countless excellences to the hearts of all, is the first of its kind. None do I know that better deserves to be the hero of any epic, now and for ever ; for, you are the rest and support of all " (do. VII. 98.) That is how Brahma speaks of the Lord ; and he stands nearest to Him. It is but a waste of time and labour to apply the Ramayana and its incidents to Rudra.

Q. If Rama be the Supreme One, how is it that we hear of his worshipping the sun to strengthen himself against Ravana ?

• *A.* " When you are in Rome do as the Romans do." He was in the world of men, and should behave as such. This explains his discipleship under Visvamithra.

So, the Balakanda teaches us that the Lord Vishnu is the Cause of the universe ; in the Ayodhyakanda, He appears as the Protector; in the Aranyakanda, He leads his children unto his House ; in the Kishkindhakanda, His manifold excellences are brought home to us ; in the Sundarakanda, He appears in his irresistible might ; and in the Yuddhakanda, He is declared to be the goal of all knowledge, human and divine.

ii

Q. This Supreme One, how is he realised ?

A. "He who brought into manifestation Brahma before the rest, He who imparted unto him the beginning and the end of all wisdom, He who illuminates our intellect and our soul, as supreme Deity thereof, Him do I take refuge in, desirous of Liberation." This Vedic text is the key-note of Valmeeki's poem. Supreme surrender to the Lord is the best means to accomplish our desires.

(a) " Meanwhile, the Lord of the Worlds, Maha Vishnu manifested himself unto them in his infinite glory. The Divine Weapons graced his hands, while his bright garments flashed as lightning from the heart of storm-clouds"—(*V R.* I. 15). The Supreme Lord was anxiously awaiting the moment when the Gods would appeal to him for help and protection. His glory was heightened as it were by the joy that the time had come for him to do good to them. He was ever armed and ever ready. " Smite Ravana sore ; burn him up" cried the Gods one and all. This is the first example we have of Surrender.

(b) The episodes of Sunassepha and Thrisanku teach that the highest duty lies in protecting those that seek

refuge with us. Ever seek the feet of Him who is able and willing, out of the mercy of his heart, to save you ; and you will not have asked in vain.

(c) " Lakshmana clasped the feet of his brother and took refuge with him, praying Seetha to intercede for him. (II. 31). So, an efficient Intercessor is a necessary element in Surrender.

" Until Rama grants my prayer, I quit not this hermitage, but shall ever call upon him in fasting and penance (II. 111).

Bharatha took refuge with Rama, as he desired to bring about his restoration to the throne of Ayodhya. But, the Lord had come out of it to fulfil his promise to the Devas ; so, he entrusted to Bharatha his sandals. He annihilated Ravana and his brood, redeemed his promise to the Gods, and later on, fulfilled the object which Bharatha sought at his hands. So, Surrender is never in vain.

(d) The holy hermits of Dandaka took refuge with Rama saying, "We live within your dominions and are entitled to your care and protection. We care not whether you are a crowned king at Ayodhya or a religious recluse in these lonely forests. You are our king everywhere and for ever." (III. 1). Residence within the domi- nions of the Lord forms a claim upon his mercy and amounts to seeking refuge with him.

(e) "The Crow of black heart sought shelter with his father, the king of the Gods, with the Celestials and with the Sages. But, they turned him away. The three worlds held none that dared to take him in. Back he came to where Rama sat and threw himself at his feet. The Lord of Compassion, the refuge of all, looked down in pity at the suppliant. His offence deserved cruel death and worse ; yet, the Lord spared him." (V. 38). This is another mode of taking refuge—clasping the feet of the deliverer.

(f) "You have offended Sree Rama; I see no other means of saving yourself; lift your hands to Lakshmana and appeal to his mercy." (*V. R.* IV. 32) This advice of Thara reveals to us yet another mode of it—clasping our hands in humility and reverence.

(g) "Ravana! Have you a mind to live in peace and prosperity? Would you save yourself from a terrible death? Then, make a friend of Sree Rama, the Ideal man; for, know you not that he embodies in himself the Law? They that seek refuge of him, for ever leave behind sorrow and pain,fear and grief" (*Ib.* V. 21). So said Seetha. Verily, the turning of the heart to the Lord amounts to taking refuge in him.

(*h*) "Ravana treated me as a vile slave and put me to shame before all. His sharp words pierced my heart through and through. So, I have cast behind me wife and child, wealth and luxury, and sought refuge with Rama." (*Ib.* VI. 17). Vibheeshana, who spoke the above, teaches us that we should rid ourselves of such obstacles as would stand in the way of our seeking refuge with Him. Further on, we read that "Rama spread the sacred grass on the sands of the ocean and lay upon them with folded hands and face turned towards the East (*Ib. id.* 22).

Q. But, his efforts were in vain?

A. Our would-be saviour must have the heart and and the arm to free us from our sorrow and fear; but, the Ruler of the Waters was not one such.

(*i*) "A terrible doom hangs over the heads of the Rakshasas and through Rama. So, let us lift our hands in humble entreaty to Seetha to intercede for us." (*Ib.* V. 27). Thus spoke Thrijata; and the other Rakshasi-guards signified their assent thereto by their silence. Later on, this bore wonderful fruit, in that Seetha saved them from the vengeance of Hanuman. So, it appears that one can take refuge and extend the benefits to others.

(j) Vibheeshana sought shelter of Rama ; but, the four ministers that accompanied him were saved along with him. So, the Lord's protection extends even to those that accompany the suppliant.

Enough has been said to prove that Valmeeki regards the Doctrine of Refuge as the sole path that leads to Liberation, and realises for us our utmost wishes here and hereafter.

iii

Service to the Lord is the first fruits of our efforts in this direction ; and then, the delight of His presence. This is another Truth underlying the epic.

(a) The Gods sought refuge with the Lord from the cruelties of Ravana. But, they took birth of Yakshas, Gandharvas, Apsarasas and Sages to render homage and sweet service to Him ; the death of Ravana came later on.

(b) " Brother mine ! waking or sleeping, day or night, your humble servant am I, in the lordly capital or in the lonely woods." (*Ib* II. 31). Lakshmana spoke so in the height of his joy. Rendering humble service to the Lord and our best, at all times, in all places, in all conditions of life is the supreme reward of Surrender.

(c) Bharatha prayed that Rama should come back to Ayodhya as its king, only that he may be allowed to render him service. But, he was made to offer them to the sandals of Rama before he realised his wishes.

(d) The saints and sages that abode in the forest of Dandaka claimed the protection of Rama from the cruel Rakshasas. But, they were rewarded first by his sweet presence and sweeter speech. He dawned upon their vision like the radiant moon, and they poured out their hearts in fervent blessings.

(e) " Sugreeva, the child of the Sun, gave this signal proof of his valour and humbled the pride of Ravana ; after

which, he flew back to the side of Rama." (*Ib.* VI. 40). Said Vibheeshana "I have put behind me Lanka, my friends in it and my wealth. My life, my kingdom, my friends, my all is centred in you.'"(*Ib.id.*19)Both looked upon the humble service that they offered to Rama as the prime reward of seeking his protection.

(f) The Crow besought him to spare his life ; and it was done. His cry was not in vain. But, he must be taught to turn his feet for ever from the way of the wicked ; and his eye was the forfeit.

(g) Rama of the Axe came with a heart tall with pride ; and Sree Rama drew his shaft to his ear to destroy for ever the hopes of the proud warrior. But, when the scales fell from the eyes of Parasurama, he recognised His Lord and Master ; and prayed that the shaft may destroy what stood in the way of his attaining Emancipation.

(h) The Ruler of the Waters heeded not the command of Rama ; but, when he found that Rama's shaft was consuming him, he prayed to be saved. Rama, out of his infinite compassion, spared him ; nay, the shaft was directed against the wicked Asuras that harassed the ocean-king.

He who seeks refuge must be conscious of his utter inability to save himself. He should be denied shelter by every one. Now, Rama possessed not these essentials. Further, the Saviour must be omniscient, must be omnipotent,which the ocean-king was not. But, Vibheeshana, proud in the fulfilment of *his* prayers, requested Sree Rama to imitate him. But Sree Rama was not Vibheeshana ; nor the ocean-king Sree Rama.

There are no stringent conditions about this Doctrine of Refuge—time, place, qualifications and the like.

Hence, the Ramayana is an Exposition of the Doctrine of Surrender (Saranagathi Grantha).

The Lord's might and his wisdom were made manifest

in his breaking of the bow of Rudra; in the humbling of Parasurama; in the piercing of the seven Sala trees; and in the bridge that he cast over the rebellious ocean. His behaviour when he was separated from Seetha, brings out the supreme compassion of his heart and its pathos. His friendship towards Guha, Sabari and Sugreeva reflects his goodness. He protected Visvamithra's sacrifice from the Rakshasas that threatened to destroy it. He saved the sages of the Dandakaranya from the night-rangers that afflicted them sore. He gave refuge to the Devas who groaned under the iron heel of Ravana, Indrajith, Kumbhakarna and their followers. Those that had the good fortune to be born in his kingdom enjoyed the delight of his presence, and were privileged to have before their eyes a living ideal of everything good and great. And when He went back to his abode on high, he took them along with him and gave them a place near his throne. These are proofs enough of the Lord's protective power. We can best realize our heart's fondest hopes only by taking refuge in the Lord, who shows forth in perfection such excellences as power, compassion and goodness. But yet, service to the Lord comes before the attainment of a place near his Throne of Glory. That is our chief reward; the others are but incidental, and by the way.

IV

The Glorious life of Seetha is how Valmeeki has named his great work. Thrice was she separated from her lord and husband; supreme compassion is the key-note of her character; she is after the Lord's own heart. Now these attributes are essential to the One who is to be our, Intercessor when we take refuge in the Lord.

(*a*) The black-hearted crow owed his life to *Seetha's* intercession. Ravana had it not and lost his life.

• (*b*) Vibheeshana took refuge with Rama through an Intercessor. "The world knows me as Vibheeshana. I take my refuge in Rama. Let him know it" (*Ib*. VI. 17.) Likewise, Rama accepted the suppliant through Sugreeva, the Intercessor and said, "Lord of the Monkeys! Bring him unto me." (*Ib*. *id*. 18.)

(*c*) Sugreeva himself sought refuge with Rama through Hanuman, who interceded for him.

The above teaches us to know that we should seek the Lord's mercy only through an Intercessor; or, we lose the benefit of it.

We are the servants of the Lord. Lakshmana exemplified this grand truth throughout his long life of devotion. "We are the sons of Dasarathha; and I come next to Rama. His excellences drew me on to serve him"; (*Ib*. IV. 4). "Accept me as your humble servitor. It is perfectly consonant with Law and Justice. Service rendered to you will realize for me the utmost hopes of *my* heart and it will go far to aid *your* work among men." (*Ib*. II. 31), said he, to emphasize the relations between himself and Rama.

vi

Bharatha could not contain himself and wept aloud before the assembled audience. He condemned Vasishtha for giving such pernicious advice. "I and this kingdom do belong to Rama. I pray you to advise me what is just and proper in this contingency." (*Ib*. *id*. 82). "Lakshmana would not hear of it, and Rama but wasted his words upon him. So he was obliged to install Bharatha as heir-apparent". (*Ib*. VI. 131). The above illustrates the truth that Bharatha, of all, regarded himself as the property of the Lord, body and soul, to do as he liked.

vii

Bharatha started from Ayodhya to pay a visit to his mother's brother and took with him Sathrughna, the faultless. The insidious foes that work our ruin—Love and Hate and their kin—were kept by him under his foot; and joyfully did he follow his master. (*Ib.* II. 1). He was the living exponent of the sublime Truth, that the best that a man can do is to be at the absolute disposal of the Lord's Elect.

viii

The Supreme, the Individual Self, the Means, the Goal and the Barriers—these are the five Basic Truths of Divine Wisdom. The Ramayana is an authoritative exposition of these, in that the deeds of Rama illuminate the nature of Brahman. The life of Lakshmana typifies the ideal Jeevathma (Individual Self). The various instances of the Doctrine of Surrender illustrate the nature of the Means. The episodes of Bharatha, Vibheeshana and others bring out in definiteness the Goal as embodied in the service rendered to the Lord. And Ravana and his kin represent the Barriers

ix

(*a*) The very Gods are no good to save us. Ravana secured marvellous boons and powers from Brahma and Siva; but, they failed him against Rama.

(*b*) He that gives us birth can lift no hand to save us from grief. Dasarathha had to be an impotent spectator of his son's misfortunes.

(*c*) The crow insulted Seetha past forgiveness; and neither its parents, the king and the queen of the Immortals, nor its kith and kin could stand between it and its fate.

(*d*) Sons and brothers cannot ward off the danger or the difficulty that overhangs us; else, Vibheeshana and

Kumbhakarna could have saved Ravana, their brother, from the wrath of Rama; or for the matter of that, Indrajith, his son, mightier than all.

So, it is brought home to us that *the Lord is our only refuge.*

Hanuman and his doings in the capital of the Rakshasas is a hint to us, that we should seek to know of the nature of the Lord only through the Teacher.

xi

"Rama, the terror of his foes, will shatter this town to pieces with his fiery arrows, and lead me forth hence in triumph; no other course befits his greatness and valour" said Seetha (*Ib.* V. 68.) Even when one is qualified to receive the Lord's Grace, he should patiently wait until the hour strikes for him to throw off his mortal coil, and stand before the Lord. For, Lanka, the capital of Ravana, is but the group of vehicles that the Self uses. Ravana, is the sense of I and Kumbhakarna is the sense of Mine. Indrajith and all the fierce-hearted Rakshasas do but typify Desire, Anger, Greed, etc. Vibheeshana, the bright exception, personifies Discriminative Knowledge. Seetha, the Individual Self, is confined by past Karma within the material vehicles. Hanuman, the Teacher, opens its eye to the mysteries of the Lord. It rests with Him to dissolve this fleshly tabernacle and lead out the imprisoned self into the light of Liberation.

xii

Such noble Beings as Rama are to be our ideals of conduct now and for ever; while Ravana and the like, are the rocks upon which we would wreck and which we should avoid.

xiii

From the account of the inhabitants of the thrice-blessed Kosala, we learn that we should ever seek to dwell only where the Lord deigns to be.

xiv

The Ramayana must of necessity form the subject of daily study and meditation, in that it expounds the mysteries underlying the Two Truths.

The Balakanda treats of the marriage of Rama with Seetha; in other words, it describes the Absolute, of which Matter and Consciousness are the two poles. This unmanifested aspect of Father—Mother, Purusha—Prakrithi or Parabhrahman—Moolaprakrithi is expressed by the syllable *Sreemath.*

The Ayodhyakanda narrates at great length, the perfections of Rama, and his ideal observance of all duties. It represents for us the Supreme one as Narayana, in his manifested aspect, 'He who broods over the waters.' This is the connotation of the next word *Narayanasya.*

The Aranyakanda gives us a vivid and entrancing picture of the Lord's divine form and beauty. This is how He shines forth in his Garment of the universe.

" In the roaring loom of Time I play,
And weave for God the garment thou seest Him by "—*Goethe.*

This is the inner sense of the next word *Charanam.*

The Kishkindha and Sundara kandas are object-lessons of the doctrine of Supreme Surrender to the Lord. This is the next and the natural step that one should take, when he has grasped, through his mind and spirit, by intense thought and meditation, the mystery of the Absolute, the Unmanifested and the Manifested. The next syllable *Saranam* expresses for us the quintessence of this teaching.

The Yuddhakanda tells us how Vibheeshana, born and brought up in the most adverse surroundings, yet, turned

away from the path of the ungodly, took refuge in the Lord and received his reward. The next syllable *Prapadye* lays down the how of it, the actual Process, the practical realization of it.

So far the Poorvakandas of the Ramayana. The Uttarakanda gives us the key to the apparent contradictions in the nature of Ravana, his intense piety, his wide, knowledge, his deep erudition and his terrible acts ; the ultimate motive of his life is laid bare for us—why he abducted Seetha. Those that rendered humble service to the Lord,—those that were labourers in His vinegard—Hanuman, Vibheeshana, Jambavan, Sugreeva and his monkey hosts—and the happy dwellers in the dominions of Rama, were taken by him even unto where he abode in his Worlds of Light, while some of them remained on earth, faithfully to discharge the trust placed in them by the Lord and work for the regeneration of that great orphan—Humanity. The other part of the Manthra or the Second Truth, voices forth the supreme mystery of Mukthi—Liberation, Emancipation, Beatitude, Consummation, Nirvana, call it what you like.

XV

What Manthra shall we meditate upon all through our life? What is the Word of Power, that will make us Lords of Time and Wisdom ? The Gayathri ; and the Ramayana is but its exoteric exposition. The Lord Almighty, the Veda Purusha, is the Causeless Cause of the Universe. This is the basic truth that underlies the Balakanda. His countless perfections and excellences form the theme of the Ayodhya and the Kishkindhakandas. The divine form, the Robes of Splendour in which He manifests himself, is described to us in the Aranyakanda, as the ravishing beauty of Rama, that attracted unto him the sages, the saints, the ascetics

and the hermits of the wild woods of Dandaka, men of stern self-control and iron discipline. The glory of the Lord, in so far as it shines through his Garments of Matter, the Universe, is symbolised in the episodes that form the subject of the Sundarakanda, *The Beautiful*,—aptly so named.

The Yuddhakanda imparts to us the means of reaching His Feet. The Uttarakanda takes us to the Goal—Mukthi. Now, the six parts of the Gayathri mantra set themselves to teach the same Truths.

XVI

Shun those that would seek to destroy your faith and devotion to the Lord.

Turn thy heart away from the atheist, the materialist, the ungodly, who would have no god but himself and no law but his will. The arguments put into the mouths of Jabali (*V. R.* II. 109) and Lakshmana (*V. R.* VI. 83.) are refuted most effectively and conclusively by Rama. It is a warning to all right-thinking men to keep away from the teachings of the Charvakas (Materialists), the Madhyamikas (Buddhist Nihilists) and the like.

XVII

Great men are often beset with troubles and difficulties. So, we should gradually wean ourselves away from the joys and sorrows of worldly life and centre ourselves in the Eternal. Rama and Lakshmana were bound by the divine weapons, the Nagasthra and the Brahmasthra. The Divine One had to renounce his kingdom, power, friends and relation, and exile himself to the frightful solitudes of Dandaka. The wife of his heart was taken away from him by force by a Rakshasa. Hence, we are exhorted not to place our trust on things transient and vain. *Govindarajeeya*,

The Inner Meaning. II

Mahavishnu, who is Beness (*Sat*), Consciousness (*Chith*), and Bliss (*Ananda*), is the shoreless ocean. The desire that sprang in Him to relieve the Earth of her burden of woe and misery, is the first wave in the still calm waters of it. The Individual Self is the first spray thrown out of it. The city of Ayodhya is the Akasa within the heart. Dasarathha, its ruler, is the pure Anthahkarana (Composed of *Manas* Mind, *Buddhi* Reason, *Chiththa* Feeling and *Ahamkara* Egoism) dominated by the quality of *Sathva*, Harmony. His queen Kausalya is *Buddhi* Reason in its *Sathvika* aspect. Rama, the son born to them, is the Self in its *Thureeya* state (beyond Jagrath, waking consciousness, Swapna, dreaming consciousness and Sushupthi consciousness in dreamless slumber). Lakshmana is the same Self in the Jagrath, Bharatha in the Swapna, and Sathrughna in the Sushupthi. These are the various manifestations of the Self. Rama followed Visvamithra from Ayodhya to guard his sacrificial rite; the Thureeya Athma is attracted by the mind. Rama slays Thataka the Rakshasee ; the Self destroys the evil tendencies of the mind. He broke the bow of Siva ; the Self curbs the fleeting course of the mind. He marries Seetha ; the Self is enveloped in Maya. Rama puts down Rama of the Axe ; the Self obtains mastery over the Karmic Vasanas (affinities generated in previous births). He exiles himself to the forests of Dandaka at the word of Kaikeyee ; Buddhi in its Thamasic (dark) aspect, leads the Self into Samsara (material existence). He kills the monster Viradha—the rooting out of Pride. Rama, Lakshmana and Seetha reside in a lowly cottage at Panchavati ; the Self descends at last into the house of flesh, built up of the five elements and rests there after his long journey. Soorpanakha assails him, and loses her nose and ears ; Desire is deprived of its sting. Khara, Dooshana and Thrisiras fall in battle with

Rama ; Lust, Anger and Greed are destroyed. Mareecha lures Rama from his abode, and is laid low ; the Self shakes itself off from the trammels of Delusion. He is parted from Seetha ; the Self is freed from the bonds of Maya in its pure aspect. Ravana carries her off ; Egoism overpowers Maya. Kabandha, the deformed, falls beneath the sword of Rama ; Grief and Sorrow are annihilated. He comes across Hanuman ; the Self has an overflow of pure devotion. He seeks the friendship of Sugreeva ; the Self is endowed with Right Discrimination. Vali is shot down by him ; the Self destroys Ignorance. Later on, he secures the aid and alliance of Vibheeshana ; the Self develops its will so as to render itself invincible. He causes a bridge to be thrown over the wide ocean ; the Self finds a means to cross the waves of Nescience. Lanka on the top of Thrikoota, is the Linga Deha (the subtle body), characterised by the three Gunas (Rhythm, Mobility, and Inertia). Rama slays in battle dire Kumbhakarna, Indrajith and Ravana ; the Self triumphs over Conceit, Envy and Egoism. Seetha passes through fire to vindicate her purity ; Maya, rendered impure through its association with Egoism, passes through the fire of Purification. They leave Lanka and travel back to Ayodhya ; from the consiousness in the subtle body back to the Akasa in the heart. Rama is crowned king over the dominions of his ancestors; the Self experiences Supreme Bliss. Sometime after, Seetha is sent away to the hermitage of Valmeeki ; the Self parts with Maya. He takes her back to himself ; Maya in its Sathvika aspect is eternally wedded to the Self. At last, Rama descends into the waters of Sarayu ; the Akasa in the heart is unified with the Boundless Akasa. And this is the realization of the Self as Beness, Consciousness and Bliss. This is Mukthi, the Consummation— *A. R. Vilasakanda* III.

The Inner Meaning. III

The sea that separated Lanka from the mainland, 100 Yojanas across, is the shoreless sea of Samsara, characterised by the consciousness of I and Mine. Lanka is but the Upadhi or Vehicle of the Jeevathma. Everything but the Supreme Self is dependent upon it—like a woman. Nescience (*Avidya*) is the Asoka garden. The pure Buddhic aspect of the consciousness of the Jeevathma is Hanuman. Kumbhakarna, Ravana and Vibheeshana stand for the three Gunas, Sathva (Rhythm), Rajas (Mobility), and Thamas (Inertia). Hanuman gives Seetha the ring of her Lord as a token , initiates Buddhi the Individual Self, in the Tharaka Manthra (the word of liberation). The Jeeva must do away with the notion that he is dependent upon any other thing but the Lord ; Hanuman sets Lanka on fire. The griefs and tribulations of the Jeeva are laid before the Lord by the compassionate Buddhi (Pure Reason) ; Hanuman takes back to Rama the news of Seetha's miserable state. Rama crosses over to Lanka in the might of his power ; the Jeeva within the Upadhi is blessed with a vision of the Lord. The fall of the Rakshasa brothers is but the annihilation of the Rajasa and Thamasa Gunas. The ministers and followers of Ravana are the modifications of the Rajasic and Thamasic Consciousness. Vibheeshana is installed as monarch of Lanka ; the pure Sathvic guna is enthroned in the Upadhis. Rama causes Seetha to be brought unto him ; the Jeeva realises the Higher Consciousness. She passes through fire , the Self bathes in the cleansing waters of the Viraja and casts off the Karmic affinities latent in the Sookshma Sareera. The God of Fire renders back Janaki to Rama ; Self puts on its Robes of Light, in which it can stand before the Throne. Seetha travels back to Ayodhya with Rama in the aerial car Pushpaka; the Individual

Self sits by the right hand of the Lord. Sree Rama is enthroned at the capital of the Ikshvakus and Seetha by his side ; the Jeevathma becomes one with the Brahman. Sugreeva, Angada, and the leaders of the monkey host stand for Manas (Mind), Chitta (Feeling), and the other Emotions. The monkeys themselves are the mental functions. Hanuman and his fellows break down the honey-grove, the royal preserves of Sugreeva ; the various modifications of the Mind are controlled and stilled Rama and his forces cross the Ocean of Egoistic conciousness—(*Anonymous*).

The Inner Meaning. IV

The Pranava, the Word, is the Beginning and the End of every thing. From its first letter A, arose Lakshmana, the Visva; he is the Jeeva in his Sthoola Sareera (Gross body). From the second letter U, arose Sathrughna, the Thaijasa ; he is the Jeeva in the Sookshma Sareera (Subtle body). From the third letter M, arose Bharatha, the Pragna , he is the Jeeva in the Karana Sareera (the Causal body) The Ardhamathra (the prolongation of the sound), is Sree Rama, the Supreme Brahman. Seetha is the Moolaprakrithi (Primal Matter). Through the force of the presence of Sree Rama, she carries on the functions of Evolution, Preservation and Involution of the Kosmos. As Pranava, she is also styled Prakrithi.

Yagnavalkya, the great yogin, approached Athri, the mind-born son of Brahma, and said, " Mahadeva meditated for countless ages upon the holy name of Sree Rama and sought after him with a devout heart. The Lord manifested himself unto him and said ' Brother ! Ask what thou wilt ; and it is thine.' Mahadeva spake unto Sree Rama, the Supreme One, ' Lord ! Grant thou this boon, that the souls that quit their fleshly vehicles on the

banks of the Ganga and especially at Manikarnika, so dear to me, may be freed for ever from the trammels of material existence.' And unto him replied the Lord, 'Brother! Those that quit their mortal coil in the spot sanctified by thy presence, be they men, be they beasts of the field, be they birds of the air, be they the worms that painfully crawl on the earth, all without exception, shall verily come unto me. And as a visible guarantee of the promise I make to you, I do abide for all time in the Holy Kasi. Those that meditate upon me and my Name of Power in that holy spot, are freed from all their sins, even the deadliest; and this I do solemnly declare unto you Those that receive from thee and from Brahma my Six-lettered Manthra, are invested with every power that they may desire; they cross the ocean of Samsara (material existence), and come unto me. They in whose right ears thou whisperest my Manthra when they depart from this life, do sit by me for ever."

Yagnavalkya called unto him Bharadwaja, and said, "The first letter of the mantra of Rama connotes Sree Rama himself, who is Absolute Consciousness, Unbounded Glory and Supreme Splendour. The very Gods ever meditate upon him to secure Emancipation. He who daily recites this holy Manthra is washed pure of all sins. He lays in the accumulated merit of countless sacrificial rites; the merit of having recited a hundred thousand times, the whole body of the Ithihasas, the Puranas and the Rudra; the merit of reciting the sacred Gayathri a hundred thousand times; and the merit of reciting the Pranava millions of times. He exalts ten generations that go before him and ten that come after him. He purifies those whom he comes across. He is a great soul. He realises Beatitude"

The following texts from the far-off Past do reveal the same Truths. " Many are the manthras associated with such

Beings are Ganapathi, Mahadeva, Sakthi, Soorya, Vishnu, and the like; but the manthra of Sree Rama is their Crown. Alone it has power—this Six-lettered Manthra—to confer upon us the highest good—and that most easily. There are no sins it cannot destroy. Hence, the wise know it as 'the *Royal Manthra.*' As a spark of fire in a mountain of cotton, it consumes to nothing all sins, conscious or unconscious, that one may commit during the year, during the month, during the fortnight, during the day. The five Deadly Sins and the millions of lesser ones vanish before the might of this Manthra. Bhoothas, Prethas, Pisachas, Koosmandas, Rakshasas and other Beings that inhabit the Bhuvarloka (the Middle world), dare not approach where the holy Manthra is recited. Happiness here, the delights of the world of Gods, and final Emancipation are the meed of him who clings to it. The slaughter of animals wild and tame; the sins of our accumulated past lives; the sins of tasting what is forbidden; the sin of robbing a holy Brahmana of his gold or gems; the sin of slaying a Brahmana, a Kshathriya or a Vaisya; the sin of foul incest or adultery; the sin of associating with the wicked, of eating with them, of sleeping with them; the sin of parricide, matricide and regicide; the sin of wantonly defiling our vows and observances; the sins that we consciously commit, waking, sleeping or in dreamless slumber; the sins consciously committed in such holy places as Kurukshethra, Kasi, and the like; the sins that countless pilgrimages to the sacred spots of the earth cannot wash away; the sins that the hardest penances and the severest mortifications cannot wipe off; the sins that a gift of one's own weight in gold cannot condone—all these and much more does the holy Manthra annihilate.

Those lands in which Sree Rama is revered, worshipped and meditated upon, know not famine, plague, pestilence

or sorrow. It has not its equal. It is the easiest passport to the grace of Sree Rama. The Lord grants his devotee length of years and happiness here; and at the end of his life, He takes him even unto Himself; yea, even unto Himself—" *Ramathapini Upanishad.*

The Inner Meaning. V.

Once upon a time, Sanaka and the other Eternal Virgins approached Hanuman and requested to be initiated in the mysteries of the holy Rama Manthra. And unto them said Hanuman, " Sree Rama is the Supreme Brahman, the Supreme Truth, the Path of Emancipation. The Lord Mahadeva, and he alone, knows in its entirety the grand mystery of the Holy Manthra; for, it forms the subject of his deep meditation ever. The eight-lettered Narayana Manthra, and the five-lettered Siva Manthra are the highest in their line. But, the most potent letters of either, the very heart of them, are drawn out and go to make up the Holy Name. The former, devoid of the single letter, means 'Not towards the securing of the highest heavens,'; and the latter, shorn of its letter of power, means 'Not towards the realisation of Absolute Goodness.' Hence, the Rama Manthra combines in itself, the essence of all the Manthras dedicated to Siva or Vishnu.

The first letter *R* is the Germ of Fire; it denotes the Supreme Self, the Sachchidananda, the Self-radiant. The same consonant without the vowel, denotes the Brahman beyond all limitations. The next letter *A* stands for Maya. The union of the two making *Ra*, signifies the descent of the Self-radiant One into Matter. The next letter *Ma* is the Germ of Eternity, and Immortality and denotes Supreme Bliss and Goodness.

As in a tiny seed of the banyan is contained the wide-spreading tree, so in the germ of the Rama Manthra is

contained the whole Universe, animate and inanimate, as the Effect in the Cause. The Supreme Brahman is beyond Maya. The letter *Ra* corresponds to the syllable *Thath* in the Mahavakya (the Great Sentence); *Ma* stands for *Thwam*; the *union* between the two is rendered by *Asi*. But, the Mahavakya is capable of conferring only Emancipation, while the Rama Manthra secures to us Happiness here and Emancipation hereafter. Besides, it is not allowed to all to recite or to meditate upon the Mahavakya; while the Rama Manthra is the common property of all. As the expression of Pranava, the aspirant for Emancipation or the man of dispassion, or he that has renounced the world to work for it, may with profit to meditate upon it. Hence, it is higher than the Mahavakya and more practically useful. He who grasps and assimilates the manifold mysteries embodied in this Sree Rama Manthra, attains Emancipation even here. Doubt it not, yea, doubt it not." —*Ramarahasyopanishad.*

The Inner Meaning. VI.

From the letter *A* arose Brahma, known on earth as Jambavan. From the letter *U* arose Upendra, known on earth as Sugreeva. From the letter *M* arose Siva, known on earth as Hanuman. From the Bindu arose the Discus of the Lord, known on earth as Sathrughna. From the Nada arose the Conch, known on earth as Bharatha. From the Kala rose Sesha, known on earth as Lakshmana. The Chit (Consciousness) beyond it, is Seetha. And beyond all, is the Supreme One, Sree Rama. He is Eternal, Pure, Consciousness, Truth, Immortality, Absolute, Perfect—the Supreme Brahman—*Tharasaropanishad.*

The Inner Meaning. VII.

Seetha is Moolaprakrithi. The letters forming her name connote Maya. Unmanifested by nature, she sometimes

manifests herself. During the chant of the Holy Writ, she is sensed as the Sabda Brahman (the Logos, the Word); this is her first manifestation. King Janaka found her at the point of his plough while he was furrowing the sacrificial ground, and made her his daughter, known on earth as Seetha; this is her second manifestation. Her third is the primal Unmanifested form.

Though she is dependent upon the Lord, yet she sheds her light on the universe, through the might of his presence. She is the energy that lies behind Evolution, Preservation and Involution. Seetha in her eight-fold manifestation of power is Moolaprakrithi.

As Pranava is her visible symbol, she is also titled Prakrithi—*Saunakeeya.*

She is Prakrithi; She is the Vedas; She is the Divine Hierarchy; She is Fame; She is the Universe; She is all; she is the Law; she is the Cause and the Effect. She exists apart from Mahavishnu; and She is identical with him. As the animate and the inanimate; as gods, sages, men, Asuras, (fallen Angels), Rakshasas (giants), Bhoothas (Elementals) Prethas (shades), and Pisachas (Nature spirits), through infinite modifications of attributes and actions; as the five Elements, the senses, the mind, the Prana (Vital current), She underlies all the manifested universe.

Ichcha Sakthi, Kriyasakthi and Sakshath Sakthi (Will, Activity and Wisdom) are her prime aspects.

Ichcha Sakthi is again varied as Sree Devi, Bhoo Devi and Neela Devi.

Sree Devi manifests herself as the energy that lies be, hind Goodness, Power, the Moon, the Sun and the Fire.

Through the Moon she presides force over plants and herbs of occult virtues. As the Kalpa tree, as flowers and fruits, creepers, herbs, medicinal leaves and the Waters of Immortality, she nourishes the Gods.

Through the Sun she supports the Shining Ones by ever increasing the Food ; the cattle, by ever producing grass and fodder ; and all beings, by shedding light and life upon them. She is Time, from its minutest point to the life-period of Brahma—seconds, minutes, hours, day, night, weeks, fortnights, months, seasons, half-years, years, Yugas, manvantaras, kalpas and parardhas. She turns the Wheel of Time.

Through the Fire she makes herself felt as hunger and thirst in all Beings , she is the face of the Gods into which are thrown the sacrificial offerings to them. She is heat and cold in the plants and the trees of the forest ; she is the fire latent in the wood and transitory on its surface. Thus, Sree Devi works out the Lord's will and comes forth as Sree and Lakshmi to sustain the universe.

Bhoo Devi is the stay and the support of the fourteen spheres, including the seven islands and the seven oceans around them. She is the Pranava, the symbol visible of the Invisible Presence.

Neela Devi is visible in the thousand and one forces that go to sustain all beings, animate and inanimate—the wind, the air, the fire, the water and the like. She is the Great Waters upon which all worlds rest. She is the Frog, one of her mystic symbols.

From the mouth of Mahavishnu arises Nada (Sound). From Nada arises Bindu (the Point). From Bindu comes forth the Pranava. From the Pranava springs forth the Tree of Knowledge (the Vedas), with its branches of Action and Wisdom.

Brahman, whose nature they illuminate, is *Kriya Sakthi.*

Sakshath Sakthi (the Direct Energy) of the Lord is inseparate from him. It lies behind Evolution,

Preservation, Disintegration and Involution, and the other world-processes. It brings about the infinite variety of Form. It is the Differentiated and the Undifferentiated. It is Self-radiance. It is the Power that showers good. It is the inexhorable Law that rights Wrong. It is the spiritual splendour of men, of sages and of Gods. It is the heart of Serenity.

The dark mole on the left breast of Mahavishnu, known as Sree Vathsa, symbolises the Ichcha Sakthi as it rests in Him during Pralaya (Involution). It is also known as *Yoga Sakthi* (spiritual powers). The Kalpa tree, the Cow of Plenty, Chinthamani, Sankha, Padma and the other treasures of the Lord of Wealth, nine in number, are the visible results of *Bhoga Sakthi* (psychic powers). This is extremely useful to those that seek the Lord interestedly or out of unalloyed devotion ; and also to those that render service unto him in the shape of raising temples and enshrining his images therein, so that the devout might meditate upon him through the eight-fold path of Yoga.

Veera Sakthi, the Goddess of Valour, is described thus. Under the spreading fragrance of the Kalpaka tree shines the gem-encrusted throne. The Lotus spreads its graceful petals over it ; and on it sits enthroned the four-armed Goddess of Valour. On all sides stand elephants, bathing her with the Waters of Immortality from the gemmed vessels in their tusks. The eight Yoga-Siddhis (occult powers), Anima, and the rest, are ranged on either side of her. Jaya and her sister Apsarasas wait upon her. The Sun and the Moon illuminate the Hall of Audience. The full moon, the new moon and the half moon hold snow-white umbrellas over her head. Hladini and Maya fan her with chamaras (chowries). Swaha, that nourishes the Gods, and Swadha, that feeds the Fathers, wave fans on either side. In front of her stand the Gods, the Vedas and

the Sciences. And from her seat of power She rules the the universe.—*Seethopanishad.*

The Inner meaning. VIII.

The Gayathri Manthra is the seed of the Tree of Ramayana; the Rama Raksha is the sprout; the Vedas are the roots; and Emancipation is the fruit of it.

Gayathri, the mother of the Vedas, is the root of all. It has three Padas (feet). They that strive after Liberation should meditate upon the Germ, from which the Tree of the Universe sprang, as the material cause of the universe in his Matter aspect, and as the instrumental cause of the same in his Brahman aspect. This is, in brief, the Truth that underlies the first foot. The universe, as the effect, is superimposed by Nescience upon the Supreme Self; He is the Cause. Hence, we are asked to banish His matter aspect and try to realise His ultimate Brahman aspect alone.

The Vedic text "The Golden Person who is visible in the heart of the Solar Orb," denotes the Primal Being, Narayana. We should meditate upon the Supreme Self in this aspect of Unbounded Light; this is His Mayaviroopa (Form of Illusion). "I meditate upon the Ineffable Glory whom men know as Rama and Krishna; who came down on Earth, time and oft, for the uplifting of the world." This is what the second foot conveys to us. This is his second manifestation, in which man might more easily meditate upon him. This is the Means to reach the Brahman, whom the first Foot sets out to describe.

"He that directs and controls our Self and its energies"—is what the third foot teaches. He can, out of his grace, curb the fleeting mind and turn it inward towards his feet. This the epitome of the Path of Action, longer and more tortuous.

The three feet of the Gayathri Manthra are the germs out of which springs the Tree of Knowledge with its branches of Wisdom, Meditation and Action.—*Maithrayana Sruthi*

RAMA RAKSHA.

The syllables of the Ramaraksha express the same truths as the Gayathri Manthra; and in them are condensed the incidents of the Ramayana.

1. *May Raghava protect my head.* He who presides over the universe, He who presides over the Annamayakosa (Food-Sheath), may He protect my head that symbolises the universe.

2. *May the son of Dasaratha protect my forehead.* The Pranamayakosa (Prana-Sheath) is drawn by ten horses (organs of sense and action) and is the effect of the Manomayakosa (Mind-Sheath). May he, who presides over it, protect my forehead,' the tablet upon which writes my destiny Brahma, who was evolved after the universe. (The Self, as manifested in each of the above sheaths, has a wider consciousness and powers than in the preceding one).

3. *May the son of Kausalya protect my eyes.* He who presides in the Vignanamayakosa (Intution-Sheath) is endowed with the faculty of cognising all impressions. May he protect my eyes, the channel of all knowledge and wisdom.

4. *May he who is dear to Visvamithra protect my ears.* The Self as manifested in the Anandamayakosa (Bliss Sheath) is filled with infinite compassion towards the universe—innate, unselfish and disinterested. It is he that in the state of Sushupthi does away with all grief and sorrow. He is the embodiment of Bliss and Consciousness. May he protect my ears through which I reach him.

[The first three Manthras superimpose the universe upon Sree Rama, the Parabrahman and the next three help to

remove the illusion. Thus far the nature of the Supreme Brahman, the Absolute, that forms the subject of the first foot of the Gayathri].

5. *May he who protected the sacrifice of Visvamithra guard my nose.* The delights of the heavenly world form the reward of sacrifices. May he, that brings about the result of sacrifices, protect my organs of smell and taste, wherewith divine fragrance and taste are experienced.

6. *My he whose heart goes out to the son of Sumithra protect my face.* The Lord's heart goes out towards Hiranyagarbha, that evolved from Himself and is the best friend of the Jeeva. Those that attain Emancipation in the ordinary way reach the world of Brahma ; there they are initiated into the mysteries of the Absolute; and when Brahma goes back to the Lord, they go along with him.

7. *May he who is the fountain of all knowledge protect my organ of speech.* Knowledge is the only means of reaching him. May he protect my organ of speech through which I acquire knowledge.

8. *May he whom Bharatha reverences protect my neck.* Those that follow the Path of Action worship him with sacrificial rites. "The Brahmanas seek to know It by sacrifices"—*Sruthi.* Manthras, Sthothras and Sasthras form the component parts of sacrificial rites. They should ever find a place in the throat, the channel through which they pass from the heart. Hence, the prayer to protect that portion of the body. The Jeeva lays by much merit by such holy acts as sacrifices ; *that* directs him to the Path of Meditation ; whereby reaches the Soothrathma (He on whom the worlds are strung).

9. *May he who wields the Divine Weapons protect my shoulders.* In his divine incarnation, the Bow, the Sword and the other weapons, symbolising Power, Time and

the like attributes, graced his arms. May he protect the corresponding portions of my body.

10. *May he who broke the Bow of Siva protect my arms.* When he walked on earth as a man among men, with the might of his arms he broke the bow of Siva that was no other than the mount Meru (the Axis of the world). Plainly, this places him above Siva. "When Mahadeva went against the Asuras of the Three Cities, the Earth was his car, Brahma his driver, mount Meru his bow, and Mahavishnu the point of his arrow."--*Sruthi.*

11. *May the Lord of Seetha protect my hands.* These two Manthras show us that Bala, one of the two Vidyas (occult sciences) imparted to him by Visvamithra, gave him unlimited physical strength.

12. *May he who put down Parasurama protect my heart.* Parasurama stored in himself the spiritual splendour of the Brahmana and of the Lord Vishnu. Rama put him down and destroyed the worlds won by his Thapas. This evidences what a mighty heart he had. Here is manifest the power of Athibala, the other Vidya, in that Rama was able to accomplish superhuman acts at once. (Manthras 9, 10, 11, and 12 teach that the third manifestation of the Lord is higher than Brahma, Vishnu and Siva).

13. *May he who slew Khara protect my trunk.* Khara and the other Rakshasas constantly meditated upon the Lord, though as their mortal enemy; hence, they stand higher than many who have never bestowed a thought upon him. The Lord fails not to reward each as he deserves. He slew Khara and his Rakshasas; and *that* was a blessing in disguise gave them a place in his world.

14. *May he, upon whom Jambavan leant as his stay and support, protect my navel.* Jambavan sought the feet of the Lord to save himself from his dire distress; his attitude

was one of love, and not of enmity. Hence, he stands on a higher level than Khara.

15. *May the Lord of Sugreeva protect my loins.* 'One good turn deserves another'. Sugreeva's relations with Rama savoured more of barter than of genuine disinterested friendship. Rama served his ends first ; and Sugreeva and his monkey hosts were of use to Rama long after. Hence, he does not come up to Jambavan's altitude.

16. *May Hanuman's master protect my thighs.* Hanuman's devotion to Rama was unselfish to the extreme ; humble service to his master and to the best of his might, was the only thing he prayed for. He stood nearest to the Lord's heart. As his favourite child, he sat upon his lap. He is the ideal Bhaktha (devotee). [The last four Manthras depict the four types of those that seek the Lord during his divine incarnations].

17. *May he, who threw the bridge over the sea, protect my knees.* The Lord is the shores of the ocean of Samsara (material existence), in that he keeps back its rolling waves and is the haven of those who toil in it. May he guard my knees that form, as it were, the feet of children when they crawl about. (This teaches us that the Lord is beyond the material vehicles. He who meditates upon him thus, is freed for ever from his vehicles).

18. *May he who destroyed the ten-headed Ravana guard my ankles.* The Lord is beyond the Sookshmasareera that works through the ten organs of sense and action. To the grown-up child the ankles form the chief help in locomotion; may He guard them. (He who thus meditates upon the lord is freed for ever from the Sookshmasareera and rests in the bosom of Prakrithi).

19. *May he who conferred all good and prosperity upon Vibheeshana protect my feet.* He opens the gates of Joy to him who escapes the jaws of Avidya

(Nesçience). May He guard my feet, the instruments of rapid locomotion. "This is the highest good. This is the highest wealth "—*Sruthi.* (This is the state of Emancipation, wherein all evil is annihilated and where supreme bliss is experienced).

20. *May Rama protect all my body.* The Lord, as the Almighty Ruler, is the monarch that shines on his Throne of Glory in the Audience Hall of the Universe. I earnestly seek to stand in his presence. May he purify my three vehicles. May he remove all obstacles and dangers on the eight-fold Path. May he, out of his grace, qualify me to find a place among the Elect.

The expression, 'Raghava,' in the first Manthra, symbolises the Universe as superimposed by Ignorance upon Brahman. The later Manthras remove this misconception. His collective and individual form is then described for purpose of meditation and Manthras 13, 18 lay down the process ; while Manthras 19 and 20 describe the destruction of evil and the realization of supreme bliss.

Hence, the Gayathri forms the germ of the Ramayana. Its 24 letters begin the 24,000 stanzas of the poem.

The Vedas form the basis of the Ramayana. Valmeeki's epic is but an amplification of the Truths taught in the Vedas ; and like the Vedas, it blesseth him that reads and him that listens to it. "The Supreme One whom the Vedas try to reach, came down on earth as Sree Rama, the son of Dasaratha ; so, the Vedas came down to where he was, as Ramayana, the child of Valmeeki's heart. So, my beloved, Ramayana *is* the Veda ; doubt it not, Parvathi."—*Agasthya Samhitha.*

"Valmeeki, the sage, chose the two royal youths Kusa and Lava out of many ; they were endowed with considerable

intelligence, had studied the Vedas, and their mysteries ; Ramayana, the record of Seetha's life, their mother, could not have a fitter exponent"—*V. R.* I. 4.

So, the Ramayana and the Vedic passages which it amplifies have a double aspect. The exoteric narrates the incidents in the life of Rama and Seetha. The esoteric unfolds the mystery of the Self. Let the intutive student ponder over it. The Vedic Manthras are the deep pool, full to the brim with the Waters of Immortality. They flow through the channels of episodes on to the broad fields of Vidya, the Science of Self ; they that walk along the Path of Action, also drink of it by the way.

Now, let us take, for example, the following Manthra, to be recited in that sacrificial rite where the two Aswins are invoked. "As a dead man leaves behind him the wealth he accumulated in his life, King Thugra cast his son into the roaring deep. But, you were there, Aswins ! ; and with numerous boats saved him and his troops." This is how the man of action would like to have it interpreted. "All the Gods and all the hymns of the Rigveda are in Him, the Supreme Self, who shines by his own light and who ever remains. He, who cannot pierce to him through these garments of sound, has very little to do with them, even in their exoteric dead letter aspect." The above vedic text affirms that the Manthras do but seek to lift somewhat of the veil that is thrown over the Nameless, whose manifestations come down to us as the presiding deities of the senses. He that has no eye for the deeper meaning has no call to study the Holy Writ. Hence, it is but just that the above Manthra should have an inner meaning. "The Self, on whom bear the burden of the past, is thrown into the ocean of Samsara (embodied existence) by the Personality that clings to material objects. Inner Ruler ! Soothrathman (Thread-Soul) ! You extend your

grace unto it ; and in the guise of the Teacher save it through the Great Sentences (Mahavakyas), that sail through the Akasa in the heart and dispel the clouds of Ignorance.

Q. It seems that the Aswinee Devas are praised in the above Manthra. Transitory objects are spoken of and as such, give no colour to the view, that the Vedas in which they are found are not composed by man.

A. Grain and the other cereals are regarded as eternal, not individually but in the type ; so, every Kalpa (life-period of Brahma), sees the divine incarnation of Rama; and as a type symbolising a kosmic event, it is eternal ; the Devathadhikarana takes this view of it. The Chamasadhikarana holds that such Manthras, though narrating past episodes, do really aim at teaching the Science of Brahman. Take the Manthra—"Aja who is red, white, and black" ; here, if we give the words their natural meaning, the passage simply expresses facts of previous knowledge and forms no evidence of superphysical truths. Hence, the Teachers understand that *Aja* denotes Prakrithi (differentiated matter) to whom are given such names as Splendour, the Waters and Food. Similar instances would naturally suggest themselves, of Manthras with an esoteric narrative aspect and an esoteric spiritual one underlying.

The Vedic text—"All names do but point to him. All Vedas do but describe the Supreme State" makes it plain that Sree Ramachandra is the subject of all knowledge, Vedic or otherwise. Indra and like expressions are but His names ; in fact, all words do but express His infinite qualities. But, the passages yield a narrative meaning too, as suited to the context.

Q. How can we understand expressions that denote

other gods as pointing to Rama ? If the aforesaid interpretation is made to serve our purpose, the words have no meaning of their own.

A. The various lines or dots that stand for the numerals 1, 2, 3, 4, are similar in form ; but, a difference of place makes them denote a unit or tens or hundreds or or thousands. Similarly, a word or a sentence can, by association with others or by difference of context, yield many meanings. The word Amritha denotes naturally the Waters of Immortality obtained during the churning of the ocean. But, in the following Vedic texts—'When this mortal man has his mind washed pure of all desire, even the least, then he becomes *Amritha* ; he attains Brahman even here ; " "May we drink of Soma ; May we become *Amritha* ; " "That is man's *Amritha;* That is yours." It stands for Emancipation, Godship, and offspring respectively. Or, take the text, "The Devas worship Yagna with Yagna." Here, Yagna, the object of worship is the Supreme One ; the Jeeva is to be viewed by us as the Supreme Brahman. But, in the passage "They sprinkle the Yagna," it means Indra, Agni and the other Devas. Again, the word denotes the sacrificial fire when it occurs in a passage about the churning of the fire. The Adhyathmika, the Adhi-Daivika and the Adhi-Bhouthika meanings stand in the relative order of their importance. The word *Indra* means literally "One who is endowed with superhuman powers" Usage too lends its support to this interpretation. But, the passage that treats of the replacing of the Garhapathya fire uses the very same expression to denote the Garhapathya fire. Again, the expression *Akasa* can but denote naturally the material Akasa ; but in the passage "Whatever is seen springs from the Akasa"—it denotes the Supreme One; the natural meaning is subservient to the conventional. So, we

conclude that narratives do often yield a spiritual meaning, and expressions denoting other deities do really stand for the Supreme Soul.

Q. There is a show of justice in interpreting such Manthras as do not lay down rules of sacrifice, to mean the Supreme Self, that they may not st nd useless. But, what of the other Manthras that are connected with sacrificial rites? Do you contend that they too point to Rama ?

A. Even so. Since the entire Vedas are devoted to that purpose alone, we have no right to except any portion of it.

Q. It is not reasonable to give such an interpretation to Manthras that are not found in sections treating of the Science of Self. Then, the passages about chopping off the branches of trees must also be interpreted to denote the Supreme Self. Then, the Karmakanda loses its value in the eyes of those who tread the Path of Action.

A. Not so. The same fact is understood variously by various grades of intelligence. A rope lying on the road is taken for a serpent by one, for a stick by another and for a rope by a third. Brahma gave out that "The person who is seen in the eye is the Athman, is Fearlessness, is Brahman." Now, Virochana, one of his auditors, understood it that the embodied self was characterised by immortality and the other attributes; but, Indra, another of them, took it that the Self transcending the vehicles was meant. Difference of intelligence sometimes accounts for difference of interpretations. Now, we read in the Maha Bharatha that Indra slew Vrithra in the body with the invisible weapon Vajra (Aswamedha Parva). " When the universe was enveloped in ignorance, the Jeeva dispelled it by Divine Knowledge that transcends the senses"—this is how the most advanced will interpret it. The Vedic text describing the Wheel of Time is interpreted as follows, to suit the intellects of a low

order. The women mentioned there stand for the deities Dhatha and Vidhatha ; the black and white threads mean day and night ; the fortnight, the month, the seasons, and the year are similarly interpreted. Now, the more advanced would see that the six seasons stand for the six senses. Each of these is made up of two months ; each sense has Desire and Aversion as its poles. A month is made up of two fortnights ; Desire and Aversion have a double aspect, according as they are directed in the direction of Dharma (the Law) or against it. Each fortnight is made up of fifteen days through the movements of the Sun and the Moon. The sun is the Self ; the moon is Manas with her sixteen rays (Prana, Sraddha, Akasa, Vayu, Agni, Water, Earth, Senses, Mind, Food, Energy, Thapas, Manthra, Karma, Worlds and Name). During sleep, the mind withdraws into itself all the rays except the last, and is absorbed in the Self. It is Avidya (Nescience), whose very nature is absolute Thamas (Inertia). The New-moon day, on which the sun and the moon are in conjunction, symbolises this truth. Later on, the rays emerge from the Self, one after another, through the agency of Viveka (Discrimination) ; this is the waxing of the Moon of Wisdom. The Self and the mind are opposite to one another, when wisdom has dawned ; the full moon typifies the disjunction of the sun and the moon. This is the Wheel of Time, the result of Action. Thus, the Manthras yield a spiritual meaning to the wise, and but the traditional one to the less advanced.

Q. If such an interpretation is the right one, how is it that Sayana and the other commentators on the Vedas have never revealed it ? Further, the incidents of the Ramayana are nowhere mentioned in the Vedic texts, like the episode of the death of Vrithra. It is hard to believe that the Ramayana is based upon the Vedas, and that all Manthras have a spiritual significance.

A. But, it is even so. The Vedic commentators set themselves to interpret the texts that bear upon the Path of Action and that sing forth the praises of the gods, in such a way as to draw the hearts of the less advanced to Action, fully aware that in course of time it will lead them on to Wisdom. The deeper meaning is not called for, and finds no place. Now, it is simply unreasonable to declare that the Ramayana incidents find no mention in the Vedas. If a blind man knocks himself against a post, is it the fault of the latter? If you care not to delve deep into the hidden mines of Vedic lore, how is Ramayana to blame for it? It is not in vain that the Maha Bharatha exclaims, "The Ithihasas and the Puranas amplify the Vedas; they reveal the inner mysteries thereof. The Vedas shun the man of little wisdom, and cry out 'Lo! this one may more likely misrepresent me.'" A room and its furniture are reflected in each mirror in it; even so, the Universe with all its ruling Powers are reflected in each God. Everyone of them forms the cause of the world; every one of them is the effect of the others. Worship of them is worship of Rama. The Vedic commentator interprets the texts to suit the purposes desired. But, it does not prevent us from reading into them the episodes of the Ramayana, by the force of context and by other traditional methods. We cannot accept the exoteric interpretations as ultimate, since they but plunge one deeper into the mire of Ignorance. So, we can well conclude that the Manthras bear only the traditional meaning to the uninitiated, while the initiated see in them a direct reference to Sree Rama and the mysteries connected with him.

Q. The Manthras found in connexion with religious acts do but mention the Gods, the materials, the method, the objects, and the results. How then, can you twist them to yield an interpretation in support of the Ramayana?

A. The Manthras are even so; but, in addition, they are invariably based upon spiritual truths. Let us take the Manthra—"You entered the great trees in the form of Krishna. Hence, I gather you in two ways." Now, this reveals the fact that the Brahman evolved the Universe and pervaded it; and the sacrificial fuel is to be regarded as one of Its manifestations. This episode we find in the Brahmanas and is but repeated in the above text. "You, as Krishna the Supreme Brahman, evolve the universe, animate and inanimate; and later on, pervade it through and through. You are one with it; hence, you are even this sacrificial fuel. I now gather you thrice seven times." Again the Manthra—"We gather the earth thrown up by him, who dived into the Waters after this Earth, that lay hidden therein." The incarnation of the Lord as the Boar is referred to, the Earth that he dug up is very sacred and should be gathered by us. Again the Manthra—"For the essence of Food and Strength,"—is used when we chop the branches of trees. The Initiate understand it to mean—"Lord of the universe! you shine forth even in this branch you have made. I chop you off to attain supreme bliss and the level of Virat—Brahman as pervading the universe; and I have attained to you." Texts that relate to inanimate objects should be similarly interpreted; for, *food* symbolises *Virat*, and the *Essence of food* denotes the Supreme One. ("Verily he is the Rasa, the Essence; having attained that essence, one enjoys bliss."—*Sruthi*). Besides, such vedic texts as "All this is Purusha;" "All this is the form of Brahman;" "That state which is hinted at by all the Vedas;" "That whom all these attain;" "The hymns of the Rigveda in the splendour of the changeless" are our authorities for so interpreting the Vedas. And this is possible only in the case of a careful student of the Ithihasas and the Puranas, who has

mastered their inner meaning; while the less advanced sees no other meaning than the praise accorded to the gathering of the material earth and the sacrificial fuel. He who worships the physical Boar is not very spiritual nor bright; but, he who sees Sree Krishna through the veil and tries to reach him is the Initiate. However, the Vedic commentator has given an exoteric interpretation to the passage as referring to the physical food and its essence ; *that* is meant to attract those whose temperament fits them for the Path of Action. But, nothing prevents the Initiate from understanding it according to his own light.

Q. We should explain the Manthras in consonance with the religious rites in which they are to be used. But, if that meaning does not fit in with the particular act, is it not better to abandon it ?

A. No. The Manthra—" Mahavishnu crossed the three worlds in three paces"—is used in the silent recitation laid down as a penance for breaking the vow of silence, as also in the oblation of ghee as a general penance. The greatness of the Lord is the only meaning we can see here ; but, nothing authorises us to interpret it in consonance with the subject in hand. He who does not acquaint himself with the Boar and the Dwarf incarnations of Vishnu cannot explain the texts solely by their context and use. Since the Vedic commentaries aim only at attracting to the Path of Action men whose temperament lies that way, we cannot expect the episodes of the Ramayana to find a place therein But, there is not the least shadow of doubt that the epic of Valmeeki is based upon the Vedas, since it but amplifies the truths taught in them. Men of little knowledge may find it difficult to pierce through the veil , but to the Open Eye of the Initiate it is transparent The Ramayana and its original, the hymns of the Rigveda, narrate the incidents in the life of Sree

Rama; but, there runs an under-current of spiritual meaning all through. Each Manthra should be explained in relation to the sacrificial rite, to the incidents in the Ramayana and to the Science of Self. (*Manthra Ramayana*).

XII.—How to read the Ramayana?

There is current a quaint saying of the wise. "You cannot spend the day better than by studying the records of the gamblers in the forenoon; the stories of women and their doings form a fit theme to while away the afternoon; and the early hours of the night form a lovely background to the adventures of the thief." Now, no one takes the above literally; but, understands it to mean that the Bharatha, that narrates the gambling of the eldest of the Pandavas and the evils that resulted therefrom, should occupy the forenoon. The Ramayana of Valmeeki, whose theme is Seetha, the ideal woman, and her sorrows, is to be recited and listened to when the day draws to a close; while, the Bhagavatha, that records in symbols the incarnation of the Supreme Purusha, Sree Krishna,—the thief who steals away our hearts—and his work among men is the best prelude one could desire to a peaceful and calm dream-life.

Valmeeki has enjoined the royal youths, Kusa and Lava, to recite just twenty chapters a day, neither more nor less. (*V. R.* VII. 93). It gives extreme pleasure to the Fathers to hear it recited, when the anniversary rites are performed in their name. Gifts of cloths cattle and gold should be made to him that reads it (*Ib. id.* III). The Coming of the Lord, the marriage of Seetha, the Installation of the Sandals, the coronation of Sugreeva, the Surrender of Vibheeshana and the coronation of Sree Rama are fitting occasions when the reciter and the expounder should be honored with liberal gifts.

XIII.—How does it benifit us?

"This record of Rama's life purifies the heart of men, destroys their sins, and confers supreme merit. Hence the wise hold it in equal reverence with the Holy Writ; and he who reads it with a devout heart, is freed from sin of every kind. A long and happy life is his portion in the world of men; and when he goes away from it, he is a welcome guest in the world of Gods and is held in high honour among them, yea, his kith and kin.

Should a Brahmana read it, gift of speech is his meed, and wisdom equalled by none. Should one of the warrior race read it, the wide Earth and all it contains owns his sway. Should a Vaisya read it, merchant princes pay homage to him, nay, should a Soodra happen to hear it read, he shall win honor and glory among his kind." (*V. R.* I. 1).

Later on, we find (*Ib. id.* 2) that Brahma conferred upon Valmeeki the Open Eye of the Seer and said, "Nothing that relates to any of the actors in that great world-drama shall escape thy all-seeing eye—Rama, Lakshmana, Seetha, men and monkeys, Gods and Rakshasas, their acts, their words, nay, their very thoughts, known or secret. Nothing that comes out of your mouth, consciously or otherwise, shall prove other than true. Sing you a poem that shall charm away the hearts of men, perfect in its rhythm and melodious in its flow. The cloud-capped mountains, the swift-coursing rivers, and all created things shall pass away and be has naught But, your noble song shall outlive them and never fade from the hearts of men And as long as the record of Rama's life holds sway over the hearts of men, so long shall you sit by me in my highest heaven."

"A rare and noble epic this, the Ramayana of honeyed verses and faultless diction, beautifully adapted

to music, vocal or instrumental and charming to hear ; begun and finished according to the best canons of the art, the most exacting critic cannot praise it too highly; the first of its kind and an unapproachable ideal for all time to come ; the best model for all future poets ; the thrice-distilled essence of the Holy Scriptures ; the surest giver of health and happiness, length of years and prosperity, to all who read or listen to it." (*Ib. id.* 4.)

"This epic confers on kings long life, fame, victory and every other blessing desired. Do you desire offspring from your loins? You fail not to get it. Is wealth your object ? You have it as much as you wish. The king triumphs over his enemies and rules the lord of the Earth. The woman that listen to this holy narrative with a heart full of devotion, rejoices in her length of days and wealth of children and grand-children, even to the seventh remove, like unto the queens of Dasaratha, who saw the Lord himself come down unto the earth as children of their loins and rejoiced in everything that this world can give and the next. Anger and her sister passions find not a place in the heart of him who listens to the words of Valmeeki. He puts away all misery behind him for ever. The wanderer in strange lands is restored to the bosom of those that love him. Sree Rama is ever ready to gratify his requests. The Shining Ones are delighted beyond measure. The evil Powers that may infest his house become his very friends and benefactors. Young women do bring forth excellent sons to gladden their hearts. Those of the royal race that listen to it with a devout heart from some good Brahmana, are ever blessed with wealth unbounded and offspring numerous. In short, an evergrowing circle of kinsmen, abundance of wealth and corn, faithful and devoted wives, perfect health, long life, fame and upright heart, spiritual splendour, good brothers and every thing that the human heart can wish for—all this

and much more form the meed of him who studies, with a pure heart and devout, the noble epic of Valmeeki."—(*Ib.* VI. 131).

"The sages that frequent the world of Brahma requested permission of him to go back to the audience-hall of Rama and listen to the remaining chapters of the Ramayana."—(*Ib.* VII, 98).

"The Omnipresent Lord and his glory form the subject of the Ramayana. Hence, the Gods, the Gandharvas, the Siddhas and the Sages ever listen to it with hearts overflowing with joy. A single chapter of the poem confers the merit accumulated by thousands of Aswamedhas, Vajapeyas and other holy sacrifices. Pilgrimages to Prayaga, Naimisa, Kurushethra and other holy spots, Ganga and the other sacred rivers—all the merit accumulated thereby is his, who listens whole-hearted to the recital of the Ramayana. The gift of untold wealth to deserving Brahmanas at Kurushethra during sacrifices confers no greater merit. The Divine Hero fails not to lift his devotee even unto his world, nay, he becomes one with the Lord."—(*Ib. id.* 111).

XIV.—Other Ramayanas

We have reason to believe that the life of Rama was sung by many others besides Valmeeki, even during the life time of the Divine One. "Chyavana, the sage, sang the Life of Rama. But, Valmeeki, who came after him, obtained immortal fame" (*Aswaghosha's Buddha Charithra* VII. 48.) The Ramayanas of Bodhayana, Bharadwaja and many other Rishis are not now extant.

Ananda Ramayana

The Lord Mahadeva narrated the life of Rama unto his beloved, Parvathi. It forms a portion of the Original Ramayana in 100 crores of stanzas. It is divided into 9

cantos of 109 chapters and 12,252 stanzas. The Sarakanda goes over the same ground as the Ramayana of Valmeeki. The Yathrakanda gives an account of the pilgrimage undertaken by Rama. The Yagakanda describes the horse sacrifice conducted by Rama, as also his 108 sacred names.

The Vilasakanda depicts Rama's government, the prayer known as Ramasthavaraja and the Deha Ramayana (the inner meaning of it). The Janmakanda tells us about the putting away of Seetha, the birth of Kusa and Lava, their fight with the army of Rama and the coming back of Seetha to her lord; as also the Ramaraksha. The Vivahakanda is an account of the marriages of the scions of the house of Ikshvakhu. The Rajyakanda recounts the 1000 holy names of Rama, the bringing down of the trees from the heaven of Indra, the destruction of the Asura Moolaka, the conquest of the seven Dweepas and the past births of Valmeeki. The Manoharakanda contains the Laghu Ramayana (the Summary given to Valmeeki by Narada) and the Kavachas (protective manthras) of Rama, Lakshmana, Bharatha, Sathrughna, Seetha and Hanuman. The Poornakanda relates the genealogy of the Lunar Race, the battle between the kings of the Soorya and Chandravamsas and the Passing of Rama.

Adhyathma Ramayana

It is generally held that this forms a part of the Brahmanda Purana and the printed editions confirm it. But, internal evidence shows that it was related by Visvamithra. Bhavishya Purana (III, 19) tells us that "The Lord Sankara, having thus gratified the wishes of Ramananda, vanished from the place. Later on, the holy man sought out Sree Krishna Chaitanya and served him faithfully for twelve years, subsisting solely upon milk. The Master enjoined him to compose the work known later on as the Adhyathma

Ramayana". Hence, neither Valmeeki nor Vyasa can be claimed to be its author.

As usual, Mahadeva recounts it to Parvathi. The incidents of the life of Rama are described at length, with many ethical and spiritual episodes illuminating the exoteric events.

Adbhutha Ramayana

Valmeeki narrates it to his disciple Bharadwaja. It is in 27 chapters and forms a portion of the Original Ramayana. The greatness of Seetha, the events that brought about the human incarnations of Rama and Seetha, and the episode of the thousand-headed Ravana are described at great length.

Agnivesya Ramayana

I have come across only some stanzas giving the chronology of the incidents of the Ramayana.

Sangraha Ramayana

A modern work by Narayana Panditha, a follower of Sree Madhwacharya.

Yogavasishtha Ramayana

Valmeeki narrates to Bharadwaja what took place in the audience-hall of King Dasaratha when Vasishtha initiated Rama into the Science of Brahman. The teachings lean more towards the Adwaitha philosophy of Sree Sankaracharya.

Manthra Ramayana

By Lakshmanarya—a rare and unique work. About 156 hymns of the Rigveda are selected and explained as the basis of the incidents of the Ramayana. Narada taught these very same texts to Valmeeki who converted them later on into stanzas in the Anushtup metre

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it is a summary of the epic, and forms its first chapter—the Samkshepa Ramayana. The author interprets each Manthra narratively and spiritually, while he refers the reader to Sayana, the standard commentator, for the current explanation.

The Puranas

Every one of them narrates at some length the incidents in the life of Rama ; while the Padmapurana gives a comparative account of the same in a previous kalpa.

Raghuvamsa

By the famous poet Kalidasa. In 19 chapters he relates the prominent incidents in the lives of the Solar Kings from Dileepa down to Agnivarna

Bhatti Kavya

By the poet Bhatti, who lived about the time of King Dharasena, of ruler Balabhi. Evey one of the 22 Chapters of the work is built of words which illustrate some one important peculiarity in Sanskrit grammar.

Kamba Ramayana

By Kamban, the inspired Tamil poet. Night after night he listened to the various Ramayanas and the Puranas expounded by the ablest men of his time ; and the next day he sang them in melodious stanzas. He is the Milton of Tamil literature and his Ramayana is the Indian Paradise Lost.

Ramacharithramanasa

By Tulasidas, the famous saint of Northern India. He was the son of Athma Rama, and was born at Delhi. in 1575 A. D. He was warmly patronised by Shah Jahan, the Magnificent, and spent his life at Benares. In 1624 A. D. he went back unto Sree Rama, whose Life he

sang. He divides his work into 7 cantos like the Ramayana of Valmeeki, but the Balakanda is the longest of them. The Uttarakanda deals at length with the episode of the Crow-sage Bhusunda, and of Devotion in its manifold aspect.

It was thus the Ramacharithra came down to him. In a former kalpa, in a dark age of it, there lived a Soodra in the kingdom of Kosala. He was a bigoted worshipper of Siva and a bitter hater of other sects. A cruel famine drove him from his place to Ujjain, where a philanthropic Saivite took him in, relieved his wants and revealed to him the inner nature of Saivaism and the fundamental unity of all religions. But, the past karma of the unfortunate man drove him on with irresistable force to the deeper depths of intolerent bigotry. Blinded with fanatism, he came to regard his broad-hearted teacher as a heretic, and thought it his bounden duty to hold him up to criticism and ridicule. One day his master chanced to come into the temple where the misguided man was seated in devout meditation upon his God. Big with conceit, he rose not to salute him ; but, sat on with a look of pity and contempt upon his face. His teacher minded it not, so great was his heart and so full of pity for the erring one. But, the Lord Mahadeva could not pass over the open insult to his servant. "A serpent thou shall become" said he "and of unwieldy bulk." The Teacher, pained to the heart at this unlooked-for doom of dread, besought of the Lord to mitigate the severity of the sentence. "Nay" replied Siva " it can't be undone. But, your intercession shall preserve him from the blinding force of births and deaths. His course shall be unimpeded on earth, and he shall remember his past." Thus, the fanatic Saivite became an ardent devotee of Sree Rama ; and many were the houses of flesh he abode in. In one of them he was a Brahmana; and sought the lonely retreats of Mount Meru,

where he came upon the Rishi Lomasa. Our friend clasped his feet in reverence and prayed to be instructed in' the Science of Brahman. Lomasa tried to draw his heart towards the Absolute, beyond all attributes, beyond all Name and Form. But, he felt himself out his death in it and prayed oft to be initiated into the worship of Sree Rama. Again and again he crossed the sage, who, out of patience with him, cried out, "A croaking crow thou shalt become." (We should not jump to the conclusion that Lomasa, the sage of restrained self, could not keep his temper. Far from it. He was but the mouthpiece of the karma of the man, that came to a head at that moment). But, the Brahmana had now a clearer intellect and a calmer heart. He accepted with gladness the apparent cuise as one more debt paid, as one more stone removed from the Path of Progress. Lomasa thereupon instructed him in the mysteries connected with Sree Rama and narrated unto him the Life-record of the Divine One, known as Ramacharithra Manasa. The crow passed beyond the portals of Death ; Time had no power over him. His vision was unclouded and saw far into the heart of things. Rama had not a more ardent devotee. He was the great Yogi, *Bhusunda.*

When Rama was bound by the magic weapons of Indrajith, Narada despatched Garuda, the Divine Bird, to destory them. Now, the messenger was seized with a cruel doubt—"If Rama be the Supreme Brahman, how could Indrajith or any other prevail over him ?" He prayed Narada to enlighten him on the point. Narada sent him to his Father Brahma who passed him on to Mahadeva, the supreme hierophant of the mysteries connected with Rama. But, Sankara transferred him to Bhusunda, the latest addition to the fold; and Garuda heard from the crow the Ramacharithramanasa, as also the deeper truths connected with the Lord's Illusion and doings.

One day Mahadeva happened to visit Agasthya ; and Parvathi went along with him. There they had the pleasure of listening to the life and adventures of Sree Rama as narrated by the sage. Mahadeva, struck with his extreme devotion to Rama, instructed Agasthya in the deeper mysteries of the Divine Incarnation. In the course of time, Mahavishnu came down on earth as Raghava, exiled himself to Dandaka, lost Seetha, and went in search of her with a breaking heart and woe-begone countenance. Sankara failed to meet him then, try as he would. Later on, his wishes were gratified. Bhavani, who was with him, could not refrain from exclaiming to herself, "And so this is Sree Rama—who bewails the loss of his wife like any countryman ? And this is what Sankara would persist in regarding as the supreme Brahman and the object of his worship ? Verily, Agasthya was a little too enthusiastic over his hero." Sankara warned her of her grievous mistake, and let her into the truth about Rama's incarnation. "How is it, my dear, you fail to see that all this is his delightful illusion ? He is a man now and a forlorn lover ; he cannot but play the part to perfection." But, Parvathi would not yield her point. Then, Sankara advised her to go by herself and subject Rama to any test she liked ; for, that is the only means of convincing an obstinate sceptic. Accordingly, Rudrani repaired to where Rama was and stood before him as Seetha. Lakshmana could not pierce through the illusion ; but, Rama quietly called out, "Greeting to you, sister mine ! Where have you left Sankara and what would you in these frightful solitudes ? " Parvathi was dumb-founded. Wonder, a smarting sense of defeat, shame at being found out and fear for the consequences overcame her. She went back to Paramasiva ; and Rama took the opportunity to mystify her still more. Wherever she turned, there she saw

Rama, Lakshmana and Seetha, adored by countless hosts of Gods, sages and Thrimoorthis (Brahma, Vishnu and Siva). But, when she looked back, lo! it vanished. Sankara asked her with a smile, "Well, I hope you are satisfied. I am curious to know how you tested him." But, her evil hour was upon her still and she blurted out, "Nay, I thought better of it and tested him not. Your arguments were enough to convince me." Now, Mahadeva's heart was heavy with grief; Parvathi could not withstand the illusion cast upon her by Rama; and she could not keep her lips from a lie. Then, he bethought himself that she had, though for a time, assumed the guise of Seetha the Divine Mother. "No more in this incarnation shall I regard this woman as my wife; she is a mother to me and sacred." The Gods sang his praises high, who testified his devotion to Rama by such a terrible vow. Sometime after, Parvathi came to know of it and prayed hard to be forgiven; but Siva was in deep meditation and could not reply; and she dragged on a miserable existence in that body of hers for about 87,000 years. At last Sankara arose from his Samadhi and the first thing he did was to recite the holy Names of Sree Rama.

Daksha's sacrificial rite, his insult to Siva, Parvathi's abandonment of her body, her re-birth as the daughter of Himavan, her prolonged austerities to become the wife of Sankara, her marriage to him, the blasting of Manmatha, and the birth of Karthikeya followed in due course. One day Parvathi reverted to the old topic and begged her husband to clear her doubt. And Sankara, out of the supreme compassion of his heart, narrated to her the Ramacharithramanasa, even as Bhusunda gave it to Garuda. The sage Yagnavalkya got it from the crow, Bharadwaja from Yagnavalkya and Thulasidas from one of his pupils.

The Jaina Ramayana

This forms the tenth chapter of the VIIth canto of the work, Thrishashti-elakapurusha-charitra, a work written in the Prakrith dialect by Hemachandracharya, the Jaina. There is very little in common between the Ramayana of Valmeeki and the Jaina Ramayana. And that is excuse enough for my giving the readers a brief summary of it.

Bharathakhanda forms one of the nine portions of Jamboodweepa, the first of the seven globes that go to make up this Earth-chain. And at Vineetha, a lovely town in it, held sway King Sagara, of the royal line of Ikshvaku. Hunting was a passion with him, to which he sacrificed his kingdom and its cares. One day he chased a deer far, far into the woods, when his horse got out of hand and took him into a strange wood that he had never before been in. Suddenly it fell dead from exhaustion; and Sagara, faint with hunger and fatigue, trudged on wearily for a long time, until he came upon a lovely lake hidden within a thick grove. He threw himself down on its banks to rest, too tired to quench his burning thirst at the cool waters that lay to his hand. Soon he was conscious of some other presence near him, and casting his eyes in that direction, a vision of beauty dawned upon him.

A young maiden, in the prime of youth and loveliness, stood at a distance, gazing with curious eyes of fear and shyness upon the strange visitor. The grace that pervaded her form and her every movement, the dazzling radiance that enveloped her like a halo, and the stamp of nobility about her deprived him of every bit of self-control he claimed to possess; and there he stood staring at her, like any greenhorn fresh from his fields. But, the maiden was as much at a loss to account for the strange emotions that played over

her heart and rooted her feet to the spot, perforce to gaze upon the intruder with wonder-waiting eyes. It was a case of mutual love at first sight. All at once, a call from some one near broke into the lovely dream and like a flash, the girl vanished back into the grove. Sagara, who by that time had fairly lost all consciousness of where he was, or what he was doing, was rudely awakened to a sense of reality and closed his eyes to see if he was not the victim of some strange optic illusion. When he opened his eyes, there stood before him an aged man who wore the livery of a king upon him. He bowed to Sagara with the deepest reverence and said, "Lord ! I am entrusted with a message to you which I beg to lay at your feet. It might not be unknown to you that Sulochana, of the race, ruled at Gaganavallabha, hard by the Vidyadhara Mount Vaithathya. He had two children, a boy Sahasranethra and a girl Sukesi. Poornamegha, of the same race and lord of Rathanapura, was a suitor for the hand of the princess ; and as Sulochana would not favour his suit, the lover made war upon him, slew him in battle and annexed his kingdom. But, the God Chakrapani saved the lives of the children, and led them on to this forest, where they have lived ever since in disguise. It seems that Sukesi, the princess, saw you here. Her heart has gone out to you and she would give you her hand in marriage. Her brother (to whom you are not unknown by fame) looks upon it with supreme satisfaction and has sent me here to request you to repair to their lowly abode."

Sagara was overjoyed at this unexpected turn of events that promised to gratify the wildest hopes of his heart, and gladly followed his guide. He married Sukesi, and lost no time in leading an army against the usurper, whom he defeated with dreadful loss. Sahasranethra ruled over his father's dominions, and the lands of his foe.

Some time after, the friends made a pilgrimage to a famous shrine of Lord Jina, in a grove near the town of Saketha. As Fate would have it, Sahasranethra came upon Poornamegha, the murderer of his father and his son Ghanavahana. Blind with rage, he slew the father out of hand and was at the point of sending the son after him, when Lord Jina stayed his arm. Then, Sagara prayed of the Lord to lift the veil from the past. "What causes brought about such a deadly hatred between Poornamegha and Sulochana, between Ghanavahana and Sahasranethra? Why should myself and Sahasranethra be drawn towards each other by feelings of strongest affection?" Then, the Lord opened their eyes to the past, and said:—"There dwelt, of yore, at Adithyapura, a merchant by name Bhavana. He was away in other lands trading for a long time; when, he was seized with a fit of home sickness, and travelled back as fast as he could. He left his friends and fellow-travellers far behind, and came back to his home some time after midnight. In the anxiety of his heart, he knocked loud and vehemently for admittance. But, wonderful are the ways of Fate. His son Haridasa, thus rudely roused from his deep slumbers, mistook his father for some daring dacoit, least expecting his parent's arrival at that time. He rushed out in anger, and alas! struck him dead, his poor father at his own threshold, when his heart was beating high with the anticipated delight of meeting, after so long a period of separation, those whom he loved most. But, inexhorable karma could not be stayed in its course; and they were born later on as Poornamegha and Sulochana, with the old fierce animosity still ablaze in their hearts.

"A devout ascetic you were in your last birth; and two disciples you had, Sasi and Avali. One day, they chanced to quarrel over something, and Sasi killed his friend in a fit of fury. They are no other than Ghanavahana and

Sahasranethra ; and their last thoughts still dominate their hearts. Avali was your favourite and is now your friend and kinsman."

This marvellous story, this page from the past, was listened to with deep wonder and surprise by every one present. But, none drank in the words of the Lord with greater avidity than Bheema, one of the door-keepers and a Rakshasa by descent. All at once he rushed from his place to where Ghanavahana stood, fell upon his neck with tears of joy, and cried, "In my last birth I was Vidyuthnethra, the king of Kanchanapura, and you were Rathivallabha, the son of my heart. The great gods have restored you to my arms after so long a time. But, full well do I know that my days are over, and I must quit this body. So, receive from me this diamond necklace and the arts of illusion of which I am a master. I crown you king of Lanka in the Rakshasadweepa, as also of the Pathala Lanka, six Yojanas deep below the Earth. May you live long and happily to perpetuate on earth the line of Rakshasas."

Accordingly, Ghanavahana became the ruler of the Rakshasadweepa. His son was Maharakshasa, who begat Devarakshasa. His son Keerthidhavala took to wife Devi, the daughter of Sreekantha, who ruled over Vaithathya. Thatithkesa succeeded him in the sovereignty of the Rakshasadweepa.

Meanwhile, Pushpoththara of the Vidyadhara race, and ruler of Rathanapura, had long contemplated an alliance between Devi and his son Padmoththara; but, as her father would not hear of it, he resolved to revenge himself upon him. Now, Padma his daughter, had long loved in secret Sreekantha; who, coming to know of it, carried her away in his aerial car. Pushpoththara was beside himself with rage and was at the heels of his foe,

vowing dire vengeance upon him. But, Keerthidhavala interferred, and reconciled them ; whereafter, they became fast friends. Pushpoththara installed Sreekantha as the ruler of Vanaradweepa, where the latter made Kishkindha his capital. His son was Vajrakantha, who begat Dadhiratha.

Once, Sreechandra the wife of Thatithkesa, requested her husband to take her out for a pleasure trip in the ærial car. They went to Vanaradweepa, and had a very pleasant time of it ; when, a monkey tore at Sreechandra with his claws. Thatithkesa was so much enraged that he struck him dead on the spot. A devout follower of Jineswara the Lord of Compassion, he felt supreme remorse for having taken the life of a living thing. An ascetic happened to pass by, and the king questioned him as to his unwitting crime. The holy man's exhortations were so powerful as to arouse in his heart supreme indifference to the things of the world. He installed his son Sukesa on the throne and donned the orange-robes of the Sanyasi. Dadhiratha, the ruler of Vanaradweepa, had a similar turn of mind and entrusting his kingdom to his son Kishkindha, renounced the world.

Meanwhile, a great Swayamvara was announced at Adithyapura, ruled over by Manthramali. On that occasion, his daughter Sreemala threw the garland of flowers around the neck of Kishkindha of the Vanaradweepa and thereby choose him out as her partner in life. Asanivega of Rathanapura resented it as an insult to himself, fought with the successful lover and drove him out of his kingdom. Sometime after, Sukesa underwent a similar fate at his hands, when the two companions in misfortune retired to Pathalalanka with their followers, and lived a happy life there and fearless. There Indrani, the wife of Sukesa, gave birth to Mali, Sumali and Malyavan ; while Sreemala begat Adithyarajas and Riksharajas.

Mali somehow came to know that his ancestral Lanka was in the hands of the ruler of Rathanapura; he repaired thither, drove him out of his new conquests and regained his kindom. Later on, he marched upon Rathanapura and its ruler. Indra was then the king. His mother Chithrasundari was possessed of an evil spirit, that filled her with a strong passion for Indra, the Lord of the Celestials. Her husband came to know of it, and gladdened her heart by assuming the form of the object of her love. A son was born unto her, whom she named Indra. But, the boy did not stop there; he imitated his great name-sake in his weapons, retinue, vehicles and other signs of royalty and ruled long and well. Mali, the Rakshasa, fell in battle with him. Thereupon, the conqueror made over Lanka to Vaisravana, the son of Visravas and his wife Samseka. Then Sumali and Malyavan hid themselves in the Pathalalanka and led the life of ascetics. But, Sumali never despaired of restoring the fortunes of his house; so, he took to wife Kekasi, the daughter of Vyomabindu, by whom he had three sons Rathnasravas Bhanukarna (Kumbhakarna), Vibheeshana and a daughter Soorpanakha. The boys were endowed with extraordinary strength and might and stood over sixteen and a half bows-length in height. Rathnasravas, the eldest, one day came upon a necklace of gems that belonged to his father and lightly placed it round his shoulders. Now, its might was such that none could so much as move it an inch; thousand deadly serpents guarded it day and night. Sumali watched that wonderful feat of his son and, struck with the reflection of the face of the boy in the nine gems, named him Dasamukha (ten-headed).

Sometime after, the young man came to hear from his mother how their house had been rulers of Lanka and the Rakshasadweepa, how they were dispossessed of it, and were leading a hole-and-corner existence down there

as sanyasins. The spirit of his ancestors was upon him; and he retired to the depths of Bheemaranya, from which he returned master of a thousand magical arts. He married Mandodari, the daughter of Maya of the Vidyadhara race, and had by her a son Indrajith. Six thousand Gandharva women became his wives later on. He attacked Vaisravana, drove him out of Lanka and held sway over the Rakshasadweepa with great pomp. One day, he came to know through Pavanavega that the sons of Kishkindha, the old friend of his house, was thrown into hell by Yama, a descendant of Indra of Rathanapura. He proceeded to where they were, relieved them from their misery, drove Indra from his kingdom and made Adithyarajas the ruler of Kishkinda's dominions, while Riksharajas was placed over Rikshapura in the Vanaradweepa. Adithayarajas took to wife Indumathi, by whom he had two sons Vali and Sugreeva. Riksharajas married Harikantha, who bore him Nala and Neela.

Reports of the mighty strength and prowess of Vali reached Dasamukha's ears; and he proceeded forthwith to Kishkindha and his army with him. But, Vali could not understand this unprovoked attack; so, he simply caught up the Rakshasa and placed him in durance vile. Dasamukha had ample time for reflection and repentance; he frankly confessed to Vali that he had miscalculated and had caught a Tartar; he prayed hard to be set free, and vowed deathless friendship and gratitude. Vali, for all his strength and valour, seems to be a good soul and soft-hearted; and he allowed Ravana to go back in peace. Some time after, Vali installed his brother Sugreeva in his place and retired to the charming solitudes of Mount Meru to lead a life of quiet meditation. Sugreeva gave his daughter Sreeprabha in marriage to Dasamukha and celebrated it with extraordinary pomp and splendour.

Long afterwards, the Rakshasa monarch fell in love with Rathnavali, a goddess of Nithyaloka and went thither in his aerial car. All at once its course was checked; and looking down, he saw that it was Mount Meru and Vali seated there plunged in profound meditation. Fired with wrath at this insult to his majesty, he attempted to root out the mountain and Vali along with it. The monkey smiled in pity and, not disposed to be too hard upon the fool, pressed down the mount ever so much with his toe. Dasamukha could not free his hands from between the mountain and the earth. Long did he howl in his agony; and heart-rending were his prayers and protestations to Vali, who, tired of it all, let him go. This incident gave the Rakshasa a fresh epithet—the Howler (Ravana).

Sometime after, he won the grace of Jineswara and was allowed to obtain from Dharna, the serpent, the magical art known as Sakthi Now, the ambition to rule over the broad earth and the kings on it caught him in its grip; and, with Sugreeva to aid him, he started on a campaign of conquest. On his way, he broke his journey at the banks of the river Narmada to bathe and rest a while. He was engaged in devout worship of Jineswara on the pleasant sands of the river, when Sahasramsa, king of Mahishmathi, kicked away the dam that kept back its waters. The rolling torrent came upon Ravana all too soon and washed away his image and the articles of worship. Ravana, beside himself with rage, attacked Sahasramsa and took him prisoner ; but, set him free at the earnest request of his father Sathabahu. Sahasramsa never recovered from the blow ; he made over his kingdom to his friend Anaranya, and took holy orders. But, the contagion spread to the new ruler, who placed his son Dasaratharaya on the throne and became a sanyasin.

During his travels, Ravana came upon king Maruththaraya, who was engaged in a grand sacrifice. Countless sheep and cattle were tied to the sacrificial posts, patiently awaiting the hour of their death and deliverance. Ravana, as a true follower of Jineswara, could not bear to see this wanton cruelty, this hecatomb of innocent animals, with no words to voice their misery but a cry. In a fit of fury, he made sad havoc of the sacrifice. Narada, who set on Ravana to this act of mercy, came there, praised the Rakshasa and his piety, and said to the assembled crowd, "There lived of yore a great teacher by name Ksheerakadamba. His son Parvathaka, the prince Vasuraya, son of Abhichandra of Sukthimathi and myself the third, were disciples under the holy man. One day, he gave us each a bird made of flour and told us to kill it where there were none present. We took different directions. The others came back after a time and described how they killed their birds and where; but, I came back to the teacher and said, 'Reverend Sir! Try as I would, I failed to find a place where there is none; and further, I hold that harmlessness to all sentient beings is the highest virtue. The master was mightily pleased with me and condemned the others to long periods of life in hell. But, Parvathaka his son, wanted to know the why of it and argued the point with me. "The Vedas enjoin on us the sacrifice of *Aja*. Now, the word has no other meaning in good honest Sanskrit than a sheep or a goat.' 'But' cried I 'the same word has been understood to denote that which is not born. Now, what can it mean, in the name of common sense, but grain that has been kept over three years; for, then, it is useless as seed. The Vedas, ever intent upon putting down every tendency to harm any sentient being, declare that all sacrifice should be made with such grain; that is how *Aja* should be interperted.

Grain having the power of reproduction in it is, in a way, a sentient being ; and it must not receive harm at our hands. How absurd to apply the passages to authorise sacrifice of animals, so much higher in the scale of evolution than grain!' But, Parvathaka was hard to convince ; so, I referred the matter to Vasuraya as the umpire. He too decided it in favour of my opponent. But, the Gods, who are ever by us, were incensed at his unjust decision and condemned him to hell." The assembled multitude were loud in their praises of Narada for the masterly and lucid manner in which he had solved a very vexed question and let light upon it. Maruththaraya paid no heed to the ruin of his sacrifice ; he placed to heart the words of Narada and bestowed his daughter Kanakaprabha in marriage upon Ravana.

The Rakshasa king next proceeded to Mathura and was the guest of Madhu, who was the envied possessor of a trident given him by God Chamarendra. A warm friendship grew up between the two, and Ravana cemented it by giving his daughter Manorama as a wife to Madhu. News reached him through his spies that Nalacoobara was ruling his subjects with a rod of iron ; and Ravana proceeded there in all haste to punish the tyrant as he deserved. But, his wife Uparambha, a good woman and virtuous, interceded for him and promised that he would turn over a new leaf ; whereupon, Ravana left him in peace and turned his arms against Indra of Rathanapura. Now, Indra had for long years kept his name untarnished, and had jealously guarded his title of 'the Invincible.' But Fate fought against him in the shape of Ravana ; and he drank of the bitter cup of defeat. Nirvanasangama, his teacher, reminded him of a past evil deed of his, when he insulted Ahalya, the wife of a holy man Anandamali ; his defeat might be, in a way, an expiation of the sin. Indra was consoled somewhat.

Thus, Ravana ranged over the earth, now winning hard victories over some and anon suffering shameful defeat at the hands of others. On his way back to Lanka, he was met by Ananthaveerya, the sage, who said to him, " Dasamukha, my son ! you have incurred much sin by violating the wives of others. A heavy punishment is in store for you through the Lord Vasudeva. You will lay violent hands on his wife, and he will be your Fate. " Now, Ravana's heart sank within him, at these words of evil omen. " Well " he said to himself, "let the dead past bury itself. No use of crying over spilt milk. Henceforth at least, I shall keep my heart away from those who place not their affections on me."

There was a king, by name Mahendra, who held sway at Mahendrapura, near mount Vaithathya. He had a wife Hridayasundari and a daughter Anjanasundari. Countless were the princes that sought her hand in marriage, and sent their horoscopes and portraits to her father. Mahendra consulted with his ministers, and chose Vidyuthprabha and Pavananjaya as the best of the lot. Now, Vidyuthprabha was the master of unbounded wealth, was extremely proficient in all the arts and sciences of the time, and was gifted with marvellous beauty; but, the stars promised him a very short life. Pavananjaya, the son of Prahladaraya, who reigned at Adithyapura, was not endowed with such excellences as his rival ; but, the astrologers guaranteed him a very long life.

Naturally, the father chose the latter as a meet husband for his girl, fixed the day of marriage and sent word to his friends and kin that he would celebrate it at a town near the holy spot Manasatheerththa. Well, they assembled there in due course, and the preliminary rites were conducted with magnificent pomp. Pavananjaya was no fool. He knew very well that the choice fell upon him not because he was

a more eligible party than his rival, but because his life was an unusually long one. He could not repress the natural curiosity to know how his affianced took it, how the king and his people viewed it. He managed to cenceal himself in the apartments of the princess, with a view to hear for himself what they thought of the match. Anjanasundari and her two friends touched upon various current topics for a time; when, one of the girls turned to the other and said, " I cannot, for the life of me, make out why our master should pass over Vidyuthprabha, the most beautiful and wealthy of all the princes we know, and pitch upon Pavananjaya as a husband for our princess. May be you are in the secret." " Nay, nay " replied the other "there is nothing in it to make a secret of. Vidyuthprabha has but a short life before him ; and Pavananjaya has an unusually long one. At least that is what the astrologers give out. That is all." "What a pity ! " rejoined the first " Better a short life and sweet than a long one and dreary. A cup of nectar and—death the next moment, is what I would prefer to unending draughts of poison and—a lease of life, longer if possible than that of Father Time."

But, Anjanasundari quietly listened to it as became a dutiful daughter. Her face was as inscrutable as a sphinx ; nor did she chide her maids for taking that extraordinary liberty with her and the object of her father's choice. Pavananjaya unfortunately jumped to the conclusion that the princess accepted him not for his own sake ; his only recommendation was that the astrologers guaranteed him a very long life. He was the last man to make a scene. His friends, his kin and the guests shall never come to know the great sacrifice he made for their sake. He would go through the affair as if he were the most ardent of lovers; but, Anjanasundari must be a stranger to him for the rest of his life. Well, the marriage came off as grandly as any one could wish.

Pavananjaya took his bride home to his capital, gave her a splendid suite of apartments, numerous retinue and every comfort that heart could desire ; but, he never set his eyes upon her.

Ravana the Rakshasa, sustained shameful defeat at the hands of Varuna and sent word to his friend Prahladaraya to come and lead his troops against the foe. Pavananjaya caught at the opportunity to escape from a cheerless home. His parents and wife did their very best to detain him ; but he heeded them not. He travelled far during the day and encamped at night on the shores of Lake Manasarovara. It was insufferably hot and sultry. Nature seemed to hold her breath in pain. Pavananjaya rolled on an uneasy bed, listless and too tired to sleep. A swan sent up from somewhere near a doleful wail, calling upon her mate that came not. It aroused in the prince a train of thought, that unconsciously led him to reflect upon the life of happy couples,of love-matches, and of the course of true love that did run smooth. His mind had been under a cloud, and his heart warped and unnaturally perverted. What a brute he had been! And what an angel of goodness and patience his wife had proved herself! His unbounded self-conceit had certainly misconstrued her maiden modesty and silence, into a loveless heart and utter apathy. Well, he was glad that he had found out his mistake before it was too late. Not a moment should be lost in making ample reparation, even to the fullest. So, he took horse at once, and, before midnight, was at the gates of his palace unknown to any. He sought the presence of his wife ; and, to her great surprise and bewilderment, confessed everything frankly and honestly, and besought her to pardon him and forget the past if possible. They had a very happy time of it that night ; and in the small hours of the morning

Pavananjaya took leave of his wife, promising to be back as early as possible. As a sign of his visit to her that night, and to silence any scandal in case she conceived and bore him a child, he gave her his signet ring and rode back in all speed to the camp.

Anjanasundari did conceive and it came to the ears of the king and queen. They would not listen to any explanations. They would not bestow a glance at the signet ring she produced. They would not heed the advice of their prudent minister to take no action until their son should come home. The unfortunate girl was made to leave the capital the very next day. Her parents were, if possible, more stupid and pig-headed. "You do not want us to believe that they are fools enough to punish an innocent girl. *Here* is no place for you."

Now, the princess had a very dear friend of hers, by name Vasanthathilaka. She sought her out and requested shelter and help from her when her hour of pain and misery should come upon her. For once, the tie of friendship was stronger than the tie of blood. A loving heart saw more clearly than Age and crabbed Prejudice She consoled the heart-broken girl and assured her that she would see her through at any cost. They left the abodes of men far behind and repaired to the wild woods, travelling by easy stages, and subsisting on the kindly charity of those they came across. At last they reached Hanupura, a sort of oasis in the midst of a dense forest, and put up for themselves a sort of cottage near the hermitage of Amithagathi, a holy man. One morning Vasanthathilaka approached him and asked, "Holy sir! What will become of my poor friend? The child in her womb—has it happy days before it?" And to her replied the sage, "In her last birth this lady was Lakshmeevathi, one of the two queens of Kanakaratha. She

hated her rival, and in sheer spite, stole the image of Jineswara that she worshipped, and threw it on a heap of rubbish. But, repentence came upon her soon. She brought back the image and prayed to the Lord to pardon her sacrilege. That is why she was hounded out by her kith and kin. Her timely repentance will bear ample fruit, in that a son would be born unto her; and great will be his fame in all the worlds. The cloud that now darkens her fair name will soon pass away and she will be taken back with joy and honor by the very people who have discarded her."

Shortly after, Anjanasundari gave birth to a son. It was a Sunday in the month of Chaithra and the constellation Sravana ruled the day. *Hanumantha* they called him, from Hanupura, where he was born. Mighty were his feats and marvellous his deeds even as a child; and the fame of his strength and prowess flew far and fast. One morning he saw the rising Sun and mistaking it for a nice plaything, sprang into the air to bring it down. But, he found out his mistake and alighted on mount Sreesaila, which was shattered to pieces through the shock.

Meanwhile, his father Pavananjaya made war upon Varuna, routed his army and delivered from captivity Khara and Dooshana, the brothers of Ravana Thereafter, he returned to his kingdom, covered with glory and loaded with honors and presents by the Rakshasa king. A terrible shock awaited him at home. His wife, his new-found love, was mercilessly driven from the town by his own parents, who ought to have known better—and all because she had born in her womb the happy pledge of their reunion after long years of desolate misery. They might have at least waited for him to come back; *he* had a voice in the affair; *he* had more vital interests at stake. He called the people together and related to them how he had cruelly misunderstood his innocent wife, how happy Fate

brought them together, how he provided against that very contingency and how his parents were obstinately blind to the truth and had perpetrated an unheard-of cruelty. His house was left unto him desolate. His heart was far away and with his wife. He had no call to remain where the persecutors of his wife abode. He would go out into the world and search even to the remotest corners of it, even if the search should end with his life. Long did he wander and far did he roam, until at last one happy day he came upon them at the outskirts of Hanupura, living all humbly. He clasped his dear wife and dearer child to his breast. Vasanthathilaka, a mother to the poor girl when her own flesh and blood cast her out with scorn—he could not thank her enough nor think of any return of gratitude, except humbly praying her to live with him all her days and continue to be a mother to himself and his wife. They came back to his kingdom and lived there long and happily.

Hanumantha rendered signal service to Ravana the Rakshasa, who, out of a heart full of gratitude and delight, gave him to wife his daughter Sathyavathi. His sister Soorpanakha was not less grateful and bestowed her daughter Ananthakusuma upon him. On his way back, Sugreeva and Nala invited him to stay with them, and coming to know of the great service rendered by him to their old friend Ravana, gave him their daughters Padmaraga and Harimalini to wife.

King Vijaya ruled at Ayodhya. Himachooda was his wife and he had two sons Vajrabhahu and Purandara. The elder took Manorama to wife ; but, after a time, they entered the order of the monks. The younger came to the throne, and after him, father and son, Keerthiratha, Kosala, Hiranyagarbha, Nahusha, Saudana, Simharatha, Brahmaratha, Chathurmukha, Hemaratha,

Satharatha, Vathayapritha, Varidhara, Indudhara, Adithya-ratha, Mandhatha, Veerasena, Prathimanya, Prathibandhu, Ravimanyu, Vasanthalethaka, Kuberadaththa Kumku, Sarabha, Dwiratha, Simhadasava, Hiranyakasipu, Punja-sthala, Kakuthstha, Raghuraya and Anaranya. His son Dasaratha reigned at Ayodhya long and happily. King Janaka of Mithila was his contemporary and faithful friend.

One day Ravana met Narada, and asked him in a spirit of of banter, "Now, tell me when I am to die and by whom ?" To whom Narada replied, "The son of Dasaratha, King of Ayodhya and the daughter of Janaka of Mithila are your Fate." Ravana was dumb-founded at this unexpected turn of the conversation. Narada had taken him all too seriously and had spoken out a very unpleasant prophesy. But, he would cheat Destiny and give the lie to Narada ; he would make it utterly impossible for Dasaratha and Janaka to have any children at all ; he would lay them out as corpses and there was an end of it. So, he sent his brother Vibhee-shana to make away with them ; but, they had word of it before hand and were far away by the time their enemy was upon their city. Vibheeshana executed the orders of Ravana upon the life-like images that the kings had left on their throne and reported to his brother that the objects of his apprehension were no more.

Meanwhile, Dasaratha travelled a long way and settled in the Magadha country with his wives Aparajitha, Sumithra, Kaikeyee and Suprabha. In a battle with an enemy who attacked him wantonly, Kaikeyee rendered him signal service and in return got from the king two boons, which she reserved for some future occasion to ask. Dasaratha had four sons. One night Aparajitha, his eldest wife, saw in her dreams a lion, an elephant, the sun and the moon. The astrologers interpreted it that she would give birth to a son whose fame would

spread over the whole world. Shortly after, a son was born to her, as beautiful as the Goddess Lakshmi who dwells in Brahmaloka. He was an incarnation of one of the gods. They named him Padma, from the lotus on which Lakshmi sits; Rama was another of his names. The second wife likewise dreamt of a lion, an elephant, the sun, the moon, the fire, the ocean God and Lakshmi. A son was born to her, blue in hue, overshadowed by Mahavishnu. They called him Narayana and also Lakshmana. The third wife, Kaikeyee, begat Bharatha, and Suprabha was the mother of Sathrughna. About the same time, Janaka married Vaidehi and had a daughter, Seetha by name.

Later on, Atharangama, the Mlechcha king over Mayuramala, the capital of Barbaradesa, north of mount Kailas, attached Janaka, who requested his friend to assist him. Rama obtained permission to go instead of his father and defeated the enemy. This induced Janaka to give him his daughter Seetha to wife. Now, Narada came to hear of the extraordinary beauty of the princess and repaired to the house of Janaka to have a sight of her. But, Seetha was horribly frightened at his monstrous ugliness and would not come forth. Stung to the quick, Narada induced King Bhamandala to abduct Seetha. But, his father Chandragathi stopped it and sent word to Janaka to give Seetha in marriage to his son. "What a pity!" exclaimed Janaka "I have already promised her hand to Rama." But, Chandragathi would not drop the matter there. 'Such a gem of a woman shall never be the prize of pure luck ; worth, merit and valour must have a voice in it too I will send you a famous bow, Vajravartha. Should Rama succeed in so much as bending it, Seetha shall be his.' Janaka acceeded to the proposal and and invited Rama to fulfil the conditions. It was but child's play for the hero ; and Seetha became his wife,

Lakshmana married eighteen maidens of the Vidyadhara race; and Bharatha married the daughter of Janaka's brother.

Thereafter, Dasaratha was enabled to regain, through the grace of Jineswara, his lost kingdom of Ayodhya. But, the snows of age chilled his heart and he resolved to install Rama in his place. It was then that Kaikayee came forward and requested him to fulfil his promise unto her. "With the greatest pleasure" replied Dasaratha "Then," said Kaikayee "send away Rama to the distant forests and place my son Bharatha on the throne." Dasaratha, whose heart knew no deceit, whose lips were never soiled by an untruth, bowed his head in sorrow and consented to condemn to long exile the darling of his heart. Bharatha went on his knees to Rama and besought him to remain at Ayodhya and accept the throne as his lawful right. But, Rama took an example from his father and was bent upon going away from the kingdom. The old monarch had, without a moment's hesitation, sacrificed his life and every thing that it could offer him on the altar of Truth and Duty. Would he, the son of such a noble father, tarnish by his weakness for power the bright fame of his ancestors that shone far far into the illimitable past? His father's promise, of which the price was his life, should be kept in full.

Rama, Seetha and Lakshmana travelled long and far, and at last entered the dense forests of Pariyathra. They passed by mount Chittrakoota and many days' journey from it, came upon a town where they found no living soul. Rama called unto him a hunter that stood by, and asked him the reason of it "Lord!" said the man "this is or this was the famous town of Dasanga. Vajrakarni, a petty ruler, governed here with great fame and justice. He was a devout follower of Jineswara; he cut his image on his signet and vowed

that he would never bow his head to any other, god or man. This reached the ears of Simhadasa, his lord and master, who came down upon him with a large army, drove him and his subjects from the town and reduced it to the state you now see it in." Rama was extremely pained to hear it. He directed Lakshmana to punish Simhadasa for his wanton injustice and brought about a better understanding between him and Vajrakarni. This enabled the latter to devote himself heart and soul to the worship of Lord Jina.

Thereafter, they dived deeper and deeper into the dark woods and one day came upon a lovely princess wandering about in man's attire. They consoled her and came to know that her father king Valakhilya was defeated and kept in prison by Kaka, a hunter-king. Rama sent Lakshmana to slay Kaka and free Valakhilya from bondage

Another day, they travelled far and suffered much from heat, hunger and fatigue. A large banyan offered them a welcome refuge under its pillared shade A Yaksha, who had made the tree his home, came down and offered reverent worship to Rama and through his magic, a beautiful town arose on the spot, where the exiles lived for a time.

One day, Rama reached the town of Vijayapura and was sauntering through the lovely gardens on the outskirts, when he saw a beautiful girl about to put an end to her life He ran to her and succeeded in thwarting her purpose. " My good sister ! How could you ever think of going into the presence of your Maker unbid and before your time ?" " Lord ! " replied the maiden, in accents of bitter despair, "doubtless you rejoice in having saved my life and regard it as a great benefit done to me ; but, if you knew what misery I was trying to escape from, you would have been the first to kill me out of sheer pity"; and she burst into a flood of tears, Rama

blamed himself for having caused her useless grief and resolved to lighten her load of sorrow, if that were in his power. " Grieve not, my child ! Tell me what your heart yearns after ; and you *shall* have it." Then she took heart and said, "He who stands by your side, your brother Lakshmana, is the cause of all my woe. Mine is a hopeless love unreturned. Better dark death than a life of dire misery, a living hell. Now, see you not that your promise is beautifully fulfilled?" and she laughed out of very bitterness. Rama turned to Lakshmana and said, " My dear, you see that this lady is endowed with no ordinary attractions of mind and body ; she has set her heart upon you ; and I have passed my word to see her happy—which you never knew me to break. So, it would give me infinite pleasure to see you take this worthy maiden to wife." Lakshmana, to whom his brother's word was law, raised the poor girl from the depths of hopeless despondency to the highest pinnacle of joy and delight. She was to remain with her parents until they came back to take her to Ayodhya.

On their way, they came to know that Athiveerya, king of Nandavartha, was working up a conspiracy against his master and over-lord Bharatha ; and Rama punished him as he deserved.

Another time, they stayed at a town named Kshemanjali, where Lakshmana married princess Jithapadma. Two Brahmanas that lived in the mountain valleys sought his feet and were raised by him to the highest heavens.

Then, they came to the Dandakaranya, so named after Danda, the king, who took birth there as a bird to expiate his sins. Rama took pity on the poor creature and transformed him into Jatayus, a sacred bird.

Sambooka, the son of Khara and Soorpanakha, was undergoing severe austerities in a bamboo grove on the banks of

the Krounchapa. The famous sword Chandrahasa, of magical powers, was what he wanted to get. Lakshmana decided that his success would considerably endanger the safety of the world, and slew him with the very sword he was trying to get. Soorpanakha was inexpressibly pained to hear of it and complained to Rama in no mild terms. She came more than once on that errand. Rama's divine beauty enslaved her heart and she overcame a woman's sense of modesty to beseech him to marry her. But, Rama spurned her away from him as a loathsome thing, whereupon, she set her husband upon Rama and Lakshmana, who she swore had offered her deadly insult. Khara, blind with jealous rage, came upon them with a large army. Lakshmana asked Rama to take care of Seetha while he went forth to fight the Rakshasa hosts. Then, Ravana took the opportunity to do his sister Soorpanakha a favour. He concealed himself behind the hermitage of Rama, and called upon him in the voice of Lakshmana to save him from death at the hands of his enemies. Seetha at once concluded that Lakshmana was in deadly peril. She lost not a moment in sending Rama to his assistance Finding her alone and unprotected, the Rakshasa king pounced upon her and carried her to his island home in Lanka, where he placed her in the Asoka grove under the guard of fierce-visaged Rakshasis. He tried all his arts of persuasion ; he threatened her with horrible tortures and a lingering death too painful to conceive; he offered her his untold wealth and unbounded power; his wife Mandodari was induced to plead for him with all a woman's logic. But, Seetha grew more and more bitter towards Ravana and openly scoffed at him, his barbarous splendour, his wild ways, and his unbounded wickedness. Vibheeshana tried his utmost to save her from his persecutions. But, Ravana turned a deaf ear to all remonstrances and well-meant advice.

Rama and Lakshmana annihilated Khara and his forces and returned to their hermitage, intending to have a good laugh at Seetha for her wild fears for the safety of Lakshmana. But, they found their home desolate; search as they would, they came not upon Seetha, nor could anybody thereabouts give them the least news about her.

King Viratha complained to Rama and Lakshmana of the cruel treatment he had endured from Khara and Dooshana; Lakshmana freed him for ever from his tormentors and gave him the kingdom of Pathala Lanka to rule. He, out of the great gratitude of his heart, sent messengers faithful and cunning, north and south, east and west to bring him news of Seetha—but all in vain.

Sugreeva, king of the Vanaradweepa, had a wife, Thara by name, of matchless beauty and intelligence. Sahajathi fell in love with her and taking advantage of the absence of her husband, assumed his shape and proceeded to her apartments. But, as Fate would have it, the real Sugreeva came upon the scene all too unexpectedly. There was a terrible fight beteen Sugreerva and his counterfeit, in which the latter had the best of it. Sugreeva took refuge with Rama and laid before him his tale of wrong and suffering. Rama divined the truth in a moment, slew out of hand the pretender and restored Sugreeva to his kingdom and to his wife. The grateful king vowed never to rest, until he had discovered the whereabouts of Seetha.

Viratha and Bhamandala sent word to their friend Rama, that the wife of his heart was kept in durance vile at Lanka by the infamous Ravana. Sugreeva sent his monkey hosts to Lankadweepa to search it through and through. Hanumantha was entrusted with Rama's signet to watch over Seetha in her hour of peril; and the ring was to be his credentials.

The valiant Hanumantha crossed over to Lanka, interviewed Vibheeshana and through his help, managed to penetrate into the garden Devaramana, where Seetha was kept in close confinement. She was there, seated under an Asoka tree, her heart sore with grief and her thoughts full of Rama, whom she expected every moment to come to her. Hanumantha declared himself unto her as a trusted messenger from her lord, produced the signet and acquainted her with the whereabouts of Rama and what he passed through on her account. Joy illumined the heart of the poor forlorn wife. She kissed over and over the priceless ring that was to her an embodiment of her beloved; blessed Hanumantha as her deliverer from a fate worse than a thousand deaths; and gave him in return her own crest-jewel to be taken back to Rama, with an oft-repeated prayer to come on the wings of speed to Lanka and free her from the clutches of the vile Rakshasa.

Now, Hanuman would not go back without giving Ravana some tangible proof of his having been at Lanka, something to remember him by; he managed to destroy a large section of the royal army and finished up with sending Aksha, the favourite son of Ravana and a very famous general, to where his forefathers had gone before him. But, something remained to be done. He must meet the woman-stealer face to face, and have it out with him after his own way. So, he allowed himself to be bound by the magical serpent-bonds, and was taken before the king. There he brake them as so many wisps of straw; roundly rated Ravana for his evil life and his countless iniquities; and in the end, shattered to pieces the diadem of the proud monarch. He sprang away over the heads of those that stood around him, destroyed many of the fortifications of the town and was back to the mainland, leaving Ravana

and his Rakshasas utterly dazed with fear and confusion. He laid before Rama a harrowing tale of Seetha's woe, of her fortitude, of her brave defiance of Ravana and his might, of her oft-repeated prayer to be freed from that den of crime; and produced Seetha's crest-jewel to confirm his statements.

Rama, Lakshmana, Sugreeva, Hanumantha, Bhamandala and the monkey hosts marched upon Lanka in hot haste. Samudra and Sethu, two friends of Ravana, barred their way, whom Nala and Neela put to rout. Suvela and Hamsadhara met with no better fate when they tried to oppose their march. At last they approached Lanka and beseiged it. Meanwhile, Vibheeshana after one more hopeless attempt to turn Ravana's feet from the path of wickedness, went over to Rama with his army and promised signal assistance during the coming battle. Then, the two armies closed in deadly fight. Ravana sent forth his magical serpent-weapons to bind the monkey host, and render Rama utterly powerless. But, Lakshmana thought of his conveyance, the bird Garuda, who speedily appeared upon the scene, and made short work of the serpents. Rama caused a dreadful carnage among the Rakshasa hosts, and victory was almost within his reach. Now, Ravana came upon the battlefield, and recognising that Lakshmana was the most powerful of his foes, hurled upon him a magical weapon, Sakthi by name, that he had reserved against his dread enemy Lakshmana respected the convention that the Sakthi ought not to be fought against; he quietly allowed himself to be bound and lay as one dead. But, Bhamandala divined his purpose; and in a flash, he was off to mount Drona, from where he brought the Waters of Life. Rama dashed it over his brother, who rose as from a deep sleep. Then, Lakshmana, who had all along been waiting for the moment

that would end the life of Ravana, mentally called unto himself his Discus. It came, and severed the head of the Rakshasa king from his body. Vibheeshana begged hard of Lakshmana to accept the sovereignty of the Lanka-dweepa; but, in return, he himself was crowned king of it by his noble benefactor. Kumbhakarna, brother to Ravana, and Indrajith, his eldest born, were made rulers of other kingdoms.

Sixteen days they stayed at Lanka, most hospitably entertained by Vibheeshana, whose joy and gratitude knew no bounds. Thereafter, they travelled back to Ayodhya in the famous ærial car Pushpaka. Bharatha and Sathrughna met them some way from the capital; and a touching sight it was to see the brothers meet again after so many years of separation, danger and trouble. Bharatha formally and with a full heart made over the kingdom to Rama, its lawful ruler, of whom he was, as he declared, but the faithful Viceroy. "He had had enough of worldly life" he said and passed away into the silent woods, there to hold communion with the Supreme. Kaikeyee, who had ample time for reflection and repentance, was heartily ashamed of her meanness and followed her son to his calm retreat. Rama was duly installed on the throne of Ayodhya He placed Sathrughna over Madhurapuri ; gave the Rahshasadweepa to Vibheeshana; Sugreeva was to rule over the Vanaradweepa ; Hanumantha held sway at Sreepura , Viratha was rewarded for his faithful service with the vast dominions of Pathalalanka; Hanupura, where Hanuman was born, was placed in charge of Neela ; Vaithadya and Rathanapura fell to the lot of Bhamandala, the true friend. Thus, Rama remembered those that had befriended him in his adversity and stood by him through peril and danger. They were loaded with honors and presents, and went back to their respec-pective kingdoms in great joy.

Rama ruled over Ayodhya long and well; and Seetha, Prabhavathi, Rathinibha and Sreedama were his queens. Lakshmana divested himself of all cares of state, and lived a peaceful life of domestic felicity in the company of his wives Visalya, Rupavathi, Vanamala, Kalyanamalika, Rathnamalika, Jithapadma and Manorama and the two hundred and fifty children born unto them.

Dasaratha Jathaka.

It forms one of the Birth-stories of Lord Buddha and is written in Pali prose. It confines itself to the first part of Rama's adventures, and his wanderings in the forest and ends with his marriage to Seetha. But, the most curious thing about it is that Rama is represented as the brother of Seetha. A verse from chapter 128 of the Yuddhakanda is found in it.

OTHER WORKS ON THE SUBJECT

POEMS

1. *Sethu-bandha* :—A poem written in the Prakritha dialect by Pravarasena. Dandi refers to it in his Kavyadarsa, I, 34.

The central episode is Rama's laying a bridge across the sea that separates Lanka from the mainland.

2. *Champu Ramayana* :—in five cantos by Bhoja Raja. It is a prose work interspersed with beautiful poetry.

3. *Raghava-bhyudaya*

4. *Raghava-pandaveeya.*—by Kavi Raja. It is so worded that it may apply equally well to the adventures of Rama or the Pandavas, being in fact an epitome of the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha.

5. *Raghava-vilasa* :—by Visvanatha, the author of Sahithyadarpana.

6. *Rama-vilasa*:—by Ramacharana.

7. *Ramavilasa*:—by Harinatha. It is written on the model of the Geetha Govinda of Jayadeva.

8. *Ramachandra-charithra-sara* :—by Agnivesa.
9. *Raghunatha-bhyudaya.*
10. *Raghava-naishadheeya* :—by Hara-daththa-soori.
11. *Ramayana-manjari* :—by Kshemendra.
12. *Ravanarjuneeya* —by Bhatta Bheema.

DRAMAS

1. *Mahaveera-charithra* and *Uttara Rama-charithra*:—by Bhavabhoothi, dealing respectively with the incidents in the Poorvakanda and the Uttarakanda of the Ramayana.

2. *Hanuman-nataka or Maha-nataka*:—It is said to have been composed by Hanuman, who wrote it on rocks. Later on, Valmeeki sung his marvellous poem ; and lest *it* should be thrown into the shade, the faithful devotee of Rama cast *his* stanzas into the sea. Long long after, in the reign of Bhoja Raja, some portions of them were recovered and arranged by Damodara-misra. It is written in fourteen acts, and some of the stanzas are veritable gems of Sanskrit literature.

3. *Anargha-raghava* —in seven acts by Murari.
4. *Prasanna-raghava.*—by Jayadeva.
5. *Abhirama-mani* —in seven acts by Sundara-misra.
6. *Bala-ramayana*:—by Rajasekhara.
7. *Udaththa-raghava.*
8. *Unmaththa-raghava*:—by Bhaskara kavi
9. *Chalitha-rama.*
10. *Doothangada*:—by Subhata.
11. *Janakee-charana-chamara*:—by Sreenivasacharya.
12. *Janakee-parinaya* :—by Ramabhadra Deekshitha.

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BÂLAKÂNDA

CHAPTER I

VALMÎKI AND NÂRADA

LONG, long ago, when the world was yet young, and the Trêtâ yuga was nearing its end, there lived a sage, by name Vâlmîki. His knowledge of the Vêdas and the Vêdângas was deep and profound He had trod the Fourfold Path that leads to Liberation and discharged the duties of his place in life to their utmost. He had the fleeting senses under perfect control and the mind, their wayward Monarch. And unto him, in his holy hermitage, came Nârada, one fine morning, Nârada, the divine sage, Nârada, the best and foremost of the mind-born sons of Brahma. His long life had been spent in unselfish prayer and devout meditation; the bonds of Karma and material existence were to him a thing of the past; he knew no other joy than to contemplate the countless perfections of the Lord of All and the deeper mysteries of the Holy Writ; and from his Vînâ, Mahatî, he drew forth such strains, as held enthralled the hearts of all, gods and men, to the accompaniment of which he sang the praises and the glory of the Great Father, as embodied in the hymns of the Sâma Vêda. Very few equals had he in the art of speech; so clever and so convincing was he.

And to him who came there, impelled by the Searcher of Hearts, Vâlmîki respectfully submitted the following questions:—

"Lives there among men, one who is crowned with every excellent quality?

"Who has mastered the science of weapons, human and divine, and out of the might engendered thereby, is able to scatter his foes before him?

"Who is versed in the mysteries of Ḍharma, as revealed in the Vêḍas and the Smriṭis?

"Who is it that bears not in mind the grievous wrongs done him by others, but magnifies any single act of kindness on their part?

"Who is it whose thoughts, words, and deeds are ever in perfect harmony?

"Who never strays from his Ḍharma, even in the face of direst peril and distress?

"Whose life is pure and spotless?

"Who ever seeks the highest good of Humanity and of himself, here and hereafter?

"Whose eyes see clearly and unerringly between the Real and the Unreal?

"Who has a profound knowledge of men and things and twines himself round the hearts of all?

"Who is a perennial source of delight to all that approach him?

"Who, like a skilful driver, has his mind and senses under perfect control?

"Who is it that allows not his temper to get the upper-hand of him?

"Who is it, of presence so charming, that men can never have enough of beholding him?

"Whose heart knows not envy, spite, and calumny?

"Who is it that men and gods dare not face, when the fierce joy of battle is on him?

"Verily, it is almost hopeless to find all these noble elements combined in one single individual. But, if there be such a one, *you* would know it of all men; for, Reverend Sir, there is nothing, either in the heavens above, or in the worlds below, that escapes your all-seeing eye. And nothing would gladden my heart so much as to hear it from your lips, if you but deem me worthy of the honor."

He paused for a reply; and Nârada, rejoiced at having at last got an opportunity of giving out to the world what had all along lain next his heart and had been the subject of his thoughts, waking or sleeping. Lo! here was a disciple after his own heart, who thirsted for the very knowledge he was seeking to impart. What more could he desire. And then, the questions! How clear and how comprehensive! So, with a glad heart, he spoke back:—

"Well hast thou questioned and skilfully. Of a truth, it is not easy to find one in whom all these diverse excellences are united; but, with a little thought, I believe I can find you a person answering to your description. Verily, no one has a better right to know it, for, your keen and clear intellect is equalled but by your powerful memory. And now, listen with your heart and soul.

"There now rules the earth a king, by name Râma, of the godly line of Ikshwâku; and in him will you find your expectations fall very short of the reality.

"He has his self under perfect control. His prowess is unequalled. The splendour of his presence baffles description. He is serene alike in weal and woe. His intellect is strong, keen, and comprehensive There is very little that he does not know about king-craft. His sweet speech charms away the hearts of men. You can never have enough of looking at him, so lovely a sight is he to see Enemies he has none, either in the world or in himself

"Broad are his shoulders and mighty; his arms are stout and strong; his neck is poised on his shoulders with perfect grace and the three lines around it make it charming to behold. His massive jaws are but an index to the iron will of the man. His broad chest and deep flanks bespeak a strength that could lightly take up a bow and string it, that others would never dream of approaching. His joints are strong and supple and embedded deep in muscle. His friends and followers may well bid defiance to their foes, be they ever so mighty. His hands

are long and powerful and reach down below his knees. His head is exquisitely modelled and his forehead beautifully arched like a crescent. Graceful and majestic is his gait, even as that of the lion or the elephant or the tiger.

"Neither too short nor too tall, his stature becomes him marvellously. His limbs are clean made and beautifully proportioned and his rich complexion speaks of the perfect health of the man. It requires but a simple effort of his will to destroy his enemies root and branch. His eyes are large and lustrous, even as the petals of the lovely lotus. Rich in all the things of the world that make a man happy, he is, in short, the beau-ideal of a man.

"The weak and the oppressed find in him a ready and fearless champion. He never makes a resolve but it is accomplished to the utmost. He is ever intent upon the highest good of all beings. Bright is his fame as the refuge of the stricken and the terror of his foes, even as the sun in his noon-day splendour. Ever engaged in meditation on the Supreme Brahman, he has realised his oneness with IT. Untouched by Desire and by Hate, with his system purified by the regulation of the Vital Currents and other yogic practices, and with a body, which, though real and substantial to all purposes, is but an illusion, and is formed out of a film of inconceivably subtle matter, he is ever pure of body, pure of heart, and pure of spirit. He is always obedient and dutiful unto his parents, to his teachers, and to the Gods; but, he forgets not, even for a moment, *who he is and why he has come down here.*

"He looks after the welfare of his subjects, even as the Great Patriarch, Brahma. Of every kind of wealth he has enough and to spare. 'In him the worlds live and move and have their being.' Unlike other rulers of men, he reads into the hearts of his subjects and realises for them their unspoken wishes, even beyond their wildest expectations. He has a watchful eye on the rights and duties of all grades of society and sees that they are carefully preserved and properly discharged. To himself he

is the strictest of taskmasters; and his daily life is but a silent example and an unspoken lesson to the world in its perfect discharge of the manifold and complicated round of duties. Ever the spear and the shield of his friends and followers, his heart seeks their highest good here and hereafter. The Heart-Doctrine of the Vêḏas and the Vêḏângas, lies open before his unclouded vision. He is a past master in the science and art of warfare and in the use and mastery of weapons, human and divine.

"No arts nor sciences, lay or otherwise, have any secrets for him. His memory is something marvellous; in argument he is ever clear and convincing, keen and thorough in his grasp of a subject, quick and ready in his replies, anticipating the slightest objections and difficulties of his opponents. One has but to come within the range of his benign glance, nay, to seek him in earnest thought, to have his heart wishes realised to their utmost, in this world or in the next. His manners are sweet and refined. The waves of adversity beat against him, but to roll back, baffled and broken. He is ever wise and skilful in his relations with the world, lay or religious.

"As the rivers of the world, large and small, ever flow back to their heart and source, the mighty Ocean, and take rest and refuge in it, so the wisest and the best of the land, are ever attracted to him by similarity of tastes and pursuits and by an irresistible charm of manner. He embodies in himself whatever is highest and noblest in the Aryan race and nation. He is just and impartial in his dealings with all, friends and foes; and his heart is like the calm waters of the mountain-lake, unruffled by the least breath of joy or sorrow. You may look at him ever so often, but every time you find in him something that surprises you, a new beauty, a new charm.

"Said I not that Râma, the pride and joy of his mother Kausalyâ, unites in himself every conceivable perfection?

"Deep and unfathomable of purpose, like the vast and mighty Ocean whose unknown waters hide from human

eyes many a marvel and many a secret; strong in his resolve and unshaken, even as the mighty Himâlayas, the Monarch of Mountains, whose roots run into the very heart of the Earth and whose proud head pierces the blue vaults of the Empyrean; of valor and prowess like unto the Almighty; of sweet presence and charming, even as the Queen of Night, the dispeller of darkness; terrible in his wrath and all-consuming, not unlike the Fire that destroys the worlds at the close of the Great Day, but withal patient and enduring, even as Mother Earth; a great Giver, even as Kubêrâ, the Lord of Wealth; he is Truth and Justice, in human mould as it were.

"And Dasaratha, the Lord of men, yielding to the oft-repeated prayers of his subjects, set his heart upon making over his kingdom to Râma, and along with it the cares of state—Râma, the living example of every virtue, Râma, of irresistible might, Râma, the firstborn of his sons, Râma, fitted by nature and education to be the best and brightest ornament to a throne, Râma, in whose heart the welfare and happiness of his subjects occupies the foremost place.

"Now, Kaikêyî, the best beloved of his wives, viewed with a troubled heart and envious eye, the gorgeous preparations that were on foot towards the installation of Râma. Long, long ago, during a fierce battle with the Asuras, she had saved the king's life at the peril of her own; and he, in a transport of gratitude, had allowed her to ask of him any boon she would. Now was her time; and she said to the fond king 'Exile Râma to the forest and crown Bharata in his place.'

"Dasaratha never went back upon his word; for, was he not the proud descendant of the mighty monarchs of the Solar Race, who cheerfully sacrificed at the altar of Truth wife and child, wealth and kingdom, life and limb, nay, their very hopes here and hereafter, and deemed themselves happy in being allowed to do so? He sent Râma away to the wild forests and with him his own life

and happiness; for, Râma was the joy of his old age and the pride of his heart.

"But Râma, the brightest example of filial reverence, whom, alone and unaided, the world's hosts embattled dare not face, cheerfully gave up the crown that was his by right and betook himself to the forests, out of deference to his father's wishes and out of a desire to gladden the heart of his mother Kaikêyî; had they not his word for it?

"And Lakshmaṉa, the favourite brother of Râma, cheerfully accompanied him to the woods, setting to all the world a rare example of fraternal affection; he was ever a source of joy to his worthy mother, Sumiṯrâ, who sent him after Râma, with the memorable words, 'Henceforth, Râma is unto you a father and Sîṯâ your loving mother; the pathless woods are your royal home in Ayôḏhyâ; and may all good go with you.'

"As the star Rôhiṉî ever follows her Lord, the Moon, even so did Sîṯâ accompany her husband to the wild woods. Of Janaka's royal race she came, and was the fairest and best of the daughters of the earth. Dearer unto her lord than his very life, she lived in him and but for him. For, was she not his own energy, the Great Illusion, come down on earth to aid him in his great work?

"The sad king and his sadder subjects followed him a long way. At S̲ringavêra, on the banks of the Gangâ, Râma came upon a dear friend of his, Guha, the king of the wild foresters, and bade his charioteer Sumanṯra go back to his father.

"Then, guided by him, they travelled over many a trackless forest, and forded many a foaming torrent, until they halted at the hermitage of the saintly Bharaḏvâja, who directed them further on to Chiṯrakûta's hill. There the brothers built for themselves a charming cottage and led a calm and peaceful life in the pleasant woods, happy even as are the gods and the Ganḏharvas.

"Meanwhile the unhappy father, stricken even unto death at being parted from the son of his heart, passed away in an agony of grief, calling upon his darling Râma, and took his place in the Mansions of the Blessed. Thereupon Vasishtha and the other counsellors of Dasaratha tried their very best to induce Bharata to accept the vacant throne. But he, mighty of his arms and with his heart ever devoted to Râma, would not even hear of it. He was on his way to the Royal exile to beg him to come back and rule over his people.

"Soon he came upon the high-souled One in his forest home; and to him of irresistible valor, thus spoke Bharata in all humility and reverence. 'Now that our father is no more, yours is the crown, yours the kingdom; and who knows, better than yourself, that a younger brother has no claim to the throne before his elder, best fitted to adorn it? Come back and be king over us.'

Thus spake he; but all in vain, for the other felt happier among his woods and streams, and chose the path his fathers trod before him, the path of honor and fame. The kingdom was his by right and by might; but he had given his word to his royal sire, and was he the man to go back upon it? Gently, but firmly, he persuaded Bharata to go back to Ayôdhyâ, but, at his earnest prayer, gave him his sandals, thrice holy with the touch of his feet—visible representatives of the rightful king and the invisible source of Bharata's wise government and the welfare of his kingdom. Had not the world a glimpse of their greatness in the matter of Ahalyâ? 'Twice seven years hence will I meet you here. Doubt not,' were the words that fell upon the ears of the disappointed Bharata as he wended his sorrowful way back—not to Ayôdhyâ—to Nandigrâma, from where, as Regent of the Royal Sandals, he looked after the affairs of the kingdom, living the life of a hermit, his heart with Râma and his eyes ever turned along the road that should bring his brother back to him.

"Then, it occurred to Râma, that at Chitrakûta he was easily accessible to his friends and subjects ; so he resolved to penetrate into the heart of the wild Dandaka forest. True, it was a rough life and utterly unmeet for such as were brought up in the lap of royal luxury and ease. But what was it to him ? Was not his word gone forth ? Were not his mind and senses under perfect control ? He never lacked anything, in his royal palace at Ayôdhyâ, or in the rough ways of the forest.

"So, with his faculties all on the alert, he plunged into the depths of the interminable woods and his eyes acquired a new light and charm at the prospect of approaching battle with the dread Râkshasas.

"First and foremost of those that fell by his hand was the fierce Râkshasa, Virâdha.

"Thereupon, the World-honored paid his lowly respects to Sarabhanga, Sutîkshna, Agastya, and his brother, and from Agastya he received, with a glad heart, the mighty bow left with him by Indra, a goodly sword and two quivers that bore an inexhaustible supply of arrows.

"And unto Râma, who passed his days in the sweet company of the holy sages, came countless ascetics that had made Dandaka their home. Of fiery energy were they and radiant in their spiritual glory, but withal they prayed him to free them from the terrors and persecutions of the fierce Râkshasas and the lawless Asuras that infested the dark depths of Dandaka. Thereupon, Râma gave them his plighted word to root out the wicked ones slowly, but surely, whenever a favourable chance should offer itself.

"And it so came to pass, that a Râkshasî, Sûrpanakhâ by name, came upon him in his lowly abode and went away mutilated and disgraced. Janasthâna was her home and she could, by her powers of illusion, take any form she chose. Fired thereto by the sight of their sister, thus disfigured and insulted and more so by her sharp taunts, her brothers, Khara and Dûshana and Trisiras along with

them, rushed at Râma and hemmed him round with their fierce hosts; but, of the fourteen thousand terrible Râkshasas that marched forth to battle that woeful day, not one survived to tell the tale. One and all, they lay low on the field of Death, despatched to the Mansions of the Blessed by the fiery arrows of the solitary warrior.

"It was not long before the news reached Râvaṉa, who, beside himself with rage at the total annihilation of his kinsmen and at the insult put upon him, besought the assistance of Mârîcha in aiding him to accomplish his fiendish scheme of revenge. Long and earnestly did Mârîcha seek to dissuade him from his fell purpose. 'Knowest thou not thou art but a grain of dust before the Great One? Draw not, my Lord, upon thy head, the wrath of such as he.' But Râvaṉa, driven thereto by resistless Fate, spurned aside the well-meant advice of his friend, and forced Mârîcha, on pain of death, to accompany him to the hermitage of the royal exiles.

"There Râvaṉa used his friend to decoy the brothers far, far off from their cottage and in their absence, made away with the spouse of Râma, and conveyed herto his island-home in Lanka, wounding unto death, Jatâyu, the Vulture-king, who defended her with the last drop of his blood.

"The brothers came back soon enough and found that 'their house was left unto them desolate'; for Sîṯa was not there. After a while, they came upon Jatâyu, who would not yield up his life before he had acquainted Râma with the cruel outrage done him. Then, mighty grief overcame Râma, and like unto one who had taken leave of his senses, he filled the woods around with heart-rending cries and piteous lamentations. But, mastering himself with a supreme effort, he consigned to the flames the mortal remains of the valiant Jatâyu, faithful unto death, and plunged into the deep woods in search of Sîṯa.

"By and by, they fell in with a fierce Râkshasa, Kabanḏha by name, hideously deformed, and frightful to

behold. Him, Râma slew and his vast bulk threw into the fire ; and the demon, purified of his sins by the touch of the Holy One, resumed his place among the Gandharvas. But, ere his departure, he informed Râma of a woman-ascetic that lived not far off, Sabarî by name, well versed in the mysteries of Ḍharma and a worthy exponent thereof. 'Go unto her, my Lord' prayed Kabandha ; and unto her hermitage Râma took his weary way. He had come down on Earth to destroy the evil forces that barred the path of his devotees to his feet and radiant looked he in the pride of his youth and might. Warm welcome did Sabarî extend unto Râma ; and directed by her, he reached the shores of Lake Pampâ.

"There he fell in with Hanumân, a monkey, who introduced him to his master Sugrîva. And Râma related unto him all his griefs and all his misfortunes ; whereat, Sugrîva's heart was glad, in that heaven sent him a companion in misery, whose valor and prowess seemed irresistible. The two swore eternal friendship and faithful, while the God of Fire bore witness to it.

"'How did this come about?' asked Râma of his newly-made friend 'the blood-feud between you and your brother?'; and Sugrîva acquainted him with the sad story. 'Now, will I slay you that brother of thine, even Vâli,' cried out Râma ; and he swore it by a mighty oath. Then Sugrîva spoke to him of the unequalled strength of Vâli and his fierce valor, the terror of gods and men, Asuras and Râkshasas ; and half in jest, he cast his eyes upon a huge skeleton that lay hard by and said, 'This was once Ḍunḍubhi, the Asura ; and Vâli kicked it here from Kishkindha, where he slew the braggart' A curious smile played over the features of Râma—a smile of pity at Sugrîva's distrust of his might and at the trivial task set upon him to test it ; and he gave it a light kick with his toe that sent it flying twenty leagues off. Then, to make assurance doubly sure, he loosened a shaft from his bow, that cleft seven towering Sâla trees, pierced

through a mighty mountain beyond, and stayed not its course until it ran through the seven regions beneath the Earth and came back to its master.

"Sugrîva doubted no more; his eyes were opened and his spirits rose; and with a light heart and joyful mien, he took his way to the Kishkindha cave, and the princes along with him. Stationing himself before it, he gave forth from his broad and tawny chest a leonine roar that shook the hills around. Thereat, Vâli rushed out in mad fury, but was stayed by his wife Târâ, whose fears he managed to allay. And in the fierce fight that ensued, Râma's shaft cleft his mighty heart in twain. Thus did Râma fulfil his promise to Sugrîva, and seat the weary exile on his brother's throne.

"In hot haste did Sugrîva send for all the monkeys under the Sun and for their chiefs, and despatched them North and South, East and West, in search of Sîta.

"Of those that proceeded South, was Hanumân, the pride and glory of his race He heard from Sampâti, the Vulture, that Sîta was in Lanka, held there in durance vile by the infamous Râvana; and with a tremendous leap, he vaulted sheer over the two hundred leagues of roaring waters that lay between.

"Landing on the sea-girt isle where the dread Râvana held his royal sway, he came upon Sîta in the Asôka grove, her heart far away over the wide waters and with her lord. With her he had speech, and showed unto her his credentials, the ring given him by her lord. He related unto her all that befell Râma meanwhile. 'Grieve not, noble lady,' he exclaimed, 'your lord spares no pains to come to you; soon, sooner than you think, will you see him here.' And half in sport, he shattered to pieces the huge ornamental gateway of that vast pleasure-garden.

"Thereat, came against him, five mighty captains of hosts, and close upon their heels, seven sons of counsellors, whom he made short work of; then, Aksha, the valiant

son of Râvaṇa, whom he reduced to a shapeless mass; and in the end, allowed himself to be bound by the Brahmâstṛa of Inḍrajiṭ. Thanks to the boon conferred on him by the Lotus-born One, he freed himself therefrom; but, desirous to see Râvaṇa face to face and have speech with him, he chose to appear as if still in bonds, and calmly put up with the insults of his captors, who dragged him in triumph before their lord. His ruse was successful; he had the pleasure of bearding the lion in his den and failed not to give him a piece of his mind and that freely. He then burnt the town with hostile flame, all except where Sîṭa sat and flew back on the wings of speed to carry the welcome tidings to the expectant ears of his master. Soon stood he before the high-souled One, went round him reverently and cried out, 'Found! These eyes were erstwhile blessed with the sight of my mother, Sîṭa.'

"The princes lost no time in reaching the shores of the dark Ocean and along with them Sugrîva and his countless hosts. Râma called upon the Lord of Waters to come unto him, but he came not; whereat he was wroth and with his shafts, bright and fierce as the noonday Sun, he shook the mighty Ocean to its very depths. Then the heart of the Monarch of the Deep quaked within him, he laid his head at the feet of Râma and implored pardon. And at his advice, Râma caused the monkey chief, Nala, to lay a bridge across the fathomless waters. Over it they crossed to the island-home of Râvaṇa and him did Râma slay in dire battle.

Now was Sîṭa once more his own. But, sad was his heart and cruel shame held him back; for, had she not dwelt with the Râkshasa, ever so many months? Would not the cruel world point its finger of scorn at him and cry, 'Lo! he has taken her back unto him; and the vile Râvaṇa laid his unclean hands on her and had her with him long enough.' So, he spoke to her bitter words and sharp, in the hearing of the assembled hosts. And, cut

to the heart, Sîṯa, chaste as Chastity and pure as driven snow, brooked it not, but consigned her fair body unto the affrighted flames. The God of Fire bore her back in hot haste and swore her spotless and unsullied, by all he held sacred. Gladness filled the heart of Râma and his face shone bright; the three worlds rejoiced thereat, animate and inanimate, men and gods, saints and sages, and lauded to the skies the glorious deed of Râma. Vibhîshaṉa, the brother of Râvaṉa, was crowned king of Lanka in his place; and, his stupendous work accomplished, Râma's heart was relieved of a load of anxiety and danced with joy. The Gods, one and all, showered their choicest boons upon him, through which he raised to life his faithful monkeys that fell in battle.

"Then, with his friends and followers, did he turn his face towards Ayôḏhyâ, and was conveyed thereto in the swift-coursing Pushpaka, the magic air-car of Kubêra. Making a halt at the hermitage of the holy Bharaḏvâja, he sent Hanumân before him to announce his return to his brother Bharaṯa. After a while, he resumed his journey and beguiling the way by recounting his adventures in the wild woods, soon reached Nanḏigrâma."

"There the brothers put away the matted locks and lowly habiliments of recluses; and Râma, pure and stainless, welcomed Sîṯa to his heart and took his place upon his father's throne.

"Under his benign rule, the people are rich in flocks and herds. Their homes resound with the joyous laughter of happy children. Famine and disease are strangers to the land. Each order of society goes through its round of duties cheerfully and lacks not the means to do it. Their lives know no calamity, public or private. No one suffers the pangs of hunger nor eats his heart out with grief. His subjects are rich in all the joys that boundless wealth can give and are blessed with perfect health and sweet content. No father is doomed to see his son die before his eyes. Wives never outlive their

husbands nor suffer the cruel shame of widowhood, but pass their days in loving service to their lords. His subjects are immune from all perils through wind or wave, fire or fever. Thieves and robbers, hunger and want, are things unknown during the rule of Râma. Town and hamlet, village and city, are amply rich in corn and wealth. And all are as happy and content as in the Krīṭa yuga, the Golden Age of the world.

"Horse-sacrifices without number will he perform, at which he will give away to Brâhamaṉas vast quantities of gold and gems and countless heads of cattle. Hundreds and thousands of royal houses will he found, such as Kâmarûpa, Kânyakubja, and others too numerous to mention. He will see that the four orders of society are secured in their rights and privileges and discharge their duties to their very best. The years of Râma's reign on earth are ten thousand and hundreds ten. And then, in the fulness of time, will he go back to his seat in the highest Heavens.

This record of Râma's life purifies the heart of men, destroys their sins and confers supreme merit. Hence the wise hold it in equal reverence with the Holy Writ; and he who reads it with a devout heart, is freed from sin of every kind. A long and happy life is his portion in the world of men; and when he goes away from it, he is a welcome guest in the World of Gods and is held in high honor among them, yea, his kith and kin.

"Should a Brâhmaṉa read it, gift of speech is his meed, and wisdom equalled by none. Should one of the Warrior race read it, the wide Earth and all it contains owns his sway. Should a Vaiṣya read it, merchant-princes pay homage to him, nay, should a Ṣûḏra happen to hear it read, he shall win honor and glory among his kind."

CHAPTER II

HOW VÂLMÎKI CAME TO COMPOSE THE RÂMÂYAṈA.

He ceased; and Vâlmîki, the soul of righteousness, listened in awe and reverence; himself a speaker of no mean ability, he spoke to Nârada out of a full heart. "O! thou of inscrutable might! well hast thou spoken and marvellously;" and his disciples were not behind him in their glowing praises of the Divine Sage.

Later on, when Nârada rose to go, Vâlmîki offered unto him reverent worship.

"Have I your leave to go?" said Nârada.

"As my lord willeth," replied the grateful host, and the wise One resumed his aerial course towards the Heavenly Spheres.

Vâlmîki spent an hour or two in his cottage, after his guest left it, his thoughts absorbed in the eventful conversation of the morn. All at once he found that it was high time for the midday bath and started for the lovely Tamasâ, not far remote from the Gangâ.

The crystal waters of the murmuring brook caught his heart and turning to the faithful disciple that waited upon him, he exclaimed, "Seest thou yon stream, Bharadvâja, the pebbly beach carpeted with soft sand right up to the water's edge, with pleasant fords and neat? The smooth pellucid waters remind me of the hearts of good men, calm and unruffled. This is a pure spot and holy; put down thy water jar here and hand me my bathing-dress of bark, for, here will I bathe. True, the sacred Gangâ is not far off; but Tamasâ is so charming to-day, and I fear we are already behind time for the midday prayers."

The disciple bowed in reverent assent and with a ready hand offered unto his master his dress of bark; for, he regarded himself as supremely blessed in being allowed to serve the Holy One. Vâlmîki took it from him and with his senses under restraint, penetrated into the dark woods around, seeking for a suitable spot to bathe and meditate upon the Lord of All.

Not far from him, a pair of curlews, cock and hen, were disporting themselves merrily, in the best of health and spirits, singing sweetly the while; when, all at once, a fowler, the relentless foe of every innocent bird and beast, sent his arrow right into the heart of the cock, all ignoring the presence of the Holy One who was looking on. Down fell the fated bird, at the feet, as it were, of the horrified Vâlmîki and wallowed in its life-blood. With crest of golden hue and wings outspread, it was taken all unawares, mad with love and in the very act of enjoying itself with its mate. And at the sight of her lord and love, now rolling in the dust in the agonies of death, the wretched hen, shrieked a long and bitter cry, rendered all the more so, in that the flames of her love were as yet unquenched.

Vâlmîki, the soul of boundless compassion and justice, was filled with indescribable pity towards the poor hen, now hopelessly disconsolate. "A cruel act this and unnatural," cried he, "even for a hardened hunter. How could one have the heart to strike to death a poor bird, and that in the sweet embraces of love, with the fervent kisses of its mate still warm on its lips?"

The poor victim before his eyes roused the self-contained sage to ungovernable wrath and from his unconscious lips shot forth a mighty curse.

"Hapless wretch! may'st thou, for long years to come, never find a spot in this wide world to rest thy weary head. Didst thou not slay a lovely and harmless curlew, that was blind with passion and in the very arms of his love."

He spoke and paused; a dire misgiving came over his heart and he said to himself. "Passing strange! How came I, of subdued passions and serene heart, to speak words of such dread import, that rob me of my hard-earned spiritual might?"

But, even as he brooded over it, a light broke upon his mind and he exclaimed to Bharadvâja. "My heart was now wrung with pity and grief at the miserable fate that overtook the poor bird, when, these wild words of doom broke out from my unconscious lips; but lo! they are arranged in equal lines of even feet, perfect and flawless, admirably adapted to be sung or played. Well, this shall confer undying fame on me and never shall it prove otherwise."

Bharadvâja listened to him in awe and wonder—the Holy One, whose powers for good or evil were almost boundless—and softly repeated the words to himself, whereat his master was mightily pleased.

Then Vâlmîki had his long delayed bath and went through his prayers. All slowly he wended his way back to the hermitage, his thoughts still engrossed with his prophetic words,—the marvellous verse that rose unbidden to his lips and bore a terrible curse in its bosom. Bharadvâja, profoundly learned, yet lowly of heart, followed him at an humble distance with the water-jar on his shoulders, the pitcher brimming over with the pure fresh waters of the rill. Soon they reached the hermitage and the master discoursed to his disciples awhile on themes high and holy; but his thoughts were far away and with his utterance of the morning.

Then there came unto him in his calm retreat, the Four-faced One, Brahma, Father of the Earth and the Skies, the Supreme Ruler and Fashioner of countless systems. True, he could, from his seat on high, cause the holy record of Râmâ's deeds to reach the ears and the hearts of men; but, for certain reasons of his own, he chose the

fortunate Vâlmîki as a fitting instrument of that grand service to Humanity.

Up sprang Vâlmîki in wondering awe to welcome his Divine Guest of radiant presence; laid his head at his feet and duly offered unto him the rites of hospitality in all humility and reverence.

The Omniscient One accepted the seat of honor offered him, made kind enquiries about the welfare of his host and bade him sit nigh, which he did. But his thoughts ever ran upon the strange events of the day.

"Alas!" said he to himself, "how did the wretch bring himself to harm the innocent things, so sweet of voice and so entirely absorbed in their love as to be oblivious to everything around? He shrank not from the cruel deed and had caused me to lose my temper and commit an act of folly that had robbed me of my hard-won merit."

And he went on unconsciously repeating to himself the strange words that escaped his lips that eventful morn.

A curious smile lit the features of the Lotus-born One,—a smile of kindly pity in that the sage had not as yet divined the source of his inspiration.

"Know you not" said he, in accents of liquid melody "that it was at my direction that Sarasvatî, the Goddess of Speech, uttered through your lips the seeming curse? The words that cause your innocent heart a world of anxiety shall bring unto you boundless fame. Doubt no more, but give unto the world the story of Râma, even as you have heard it from my son Nârada. What nobler subject for your poem than Srî Râmachandra, the Divine hero, the soul of righteousness, the perfect embodiment of all that is good and great and the director of men's thoughts, words, deeds in the light of their Karma?

"Nothing that relates to any of the actors in that great world-drama shall escape thy all-seeing eye—Râma, Lakshmaṇa, Sîtâ, men and monkeys, gods and Râkshasas,

their acts, their words, nay their very thoughts known or secret. Nothing that comes out of your mouth, consciously or otherwise, shall prove other than true. Sing thou a poem that shall charm away the hearts of men, perfect in its rhythm and melodious in its flow. The cloud-capped mountains, the swift-coursing rivers, and all created things shall pass away and be as naught. But your noble song shall outlive them and never fade from the hearts of men. And as long as the record of Râma's life holds sway over the hearts of men, so long shall you sit by me in my hightest heaven." He spoke and was seen no more among them.

And the sage sat still in hushed awe and silent amaze, and his disciples along with him, then all at once they broke forth into melodious song, reciting again and again the sweet verse 'Mânishâḏa,' perfect in rhythm and faultless in metre; and so sung and recited by those disciples of his, grown grey in sacred lore, its fame grew apace in the world of men.

"Now" said Vâlmîki "shall I sing the Life of Râma, yea, the whole of it, in such verses as these."

Long and deeply did he ponder over it and gave to a grateful world the Grand Epic. Sung in diverse measures; of even feet and accents, grand in its style and chaste and polished in its diction; simple, yet profoundly suggestive, the mighty genius of the immortal Vâlmîki has preserved for all Eternity the glorious deeds of the Divine Man, S̱rî Râmachanḏra, in countless verses as beautiful and perfect as the one that was spoken through his lips by the Goddess of Speech. Listen ye to the noble poem '*The Fall of Ravana*,' sung by the holy sage who gave unto posterity the Life of the noblest of men, Râghava. No defect of style or idiom, grammar or diction mars its perfect beauty. Sweet and melodious of flow, the sound is a perfect echo to the sense.

CHAPTER III.

HOW THE RÂMÂYAṈA WAS COMPOSED.

Vâlmîki, the soul of righteousness, had from Nâraḏa but a bare outline of the life and deeds of S̱rî Râmachanḏra of mighty intellect—a wonderful narrative, truly, in that it realises the Purushârṯhas for those that hear it recited. But he did not stop there; he would know it more fully, in all its details and applied himself to the task.

Duly purifying himself by sipping consecrated water, he took his seat on the sacred grass spread with their ends towards the East. He reverenced in spirit his Divine Teacher and began his work, aided therein by the superhuman powers conferred on him by Brahma.

Then there unfolded themselves before his inner eye, picture after picture of old times and events—Râma, Lakshmaṉa and Sîṯâ, Ḏas̱araṯha, his queens and his subjects, as they lived and moved, laughed or cried; their joys and griefs; their friendships and enmities, whatever befell Râma, Lakshmaṉa and Sîṯâ, while they sojourned in the wild woods and later on; all these and much more did he see, plain and clear, perfect down to the minutest details, even as a fruit within his finger's clasp. Everything was even as Nâraḏa had related it to him. His face and form shone bright as he lost himself in the delightful contemplation of the divine perfections of S̱rî Râma, with the scenes of his life before his eyes, he set himself to compose the Grand Epic, the Râmâyaṉa. The shores of the Ocean are strewed with shells, seaweed and such like trifles thrown up from its bosom; but in its mighty depths lie concealed from human view priceless treasures and rare. Even so, of the four aims of life, Pleasure and Wealth lie on its surface, while Ḏharma and Môksha rest at the

bottom. The music of the verses arrests the ear, while the sense charms the heart; and it proclaims for all time, to the devout soul, the countless glories of the Supreme One, the end and aim of all World-scriptures.

In the first six books of his immortal Epic, Vâlmîki describes the coming down into our mortal world of the Lord Vishṉu, in merciful response to the earnest prayers of the Shining Ones; his heroic worth; his wonderful strength and fortitude, his kindness to every living being, his unequalled popularity; his sweet patience that nothing can ruffle; his gentleness and his constant truth, many a tale and legend old from the lips of Visvâmiṯra, when the princes sojourned with him; how at Janaka's royal hall Râma broke to pieces the mighty bow of Mahâḏêva, that none could bend; the marriage of the sons of Ḏasaraṯha; the high talk between Srî Râma and Râma of the Axe.

The rare excellences of Râma that eminently fitted him for the office of Prince-Regent; the gorgeous preparations made by Ḏasaraṯha for his coronation; how the black-hearted Kaikêyî frustrated it and caused Râma to be exiled to the forest; the poignant grief of Ḏasaraṯha and his death in consequence; the heart-rending scene when Râma took leave of the people; how he went away unperceived from among those that followed him a long way; how he met Guha on the bank of Gangâ and persuaded his charioteer Sumanṯra to return to Ayôḏhyâ; how they crossed the river and sought Bharaḏvâja in his forest abode; how, through his directions, Râma had a lovely cottage built on the sides of Chiṯrakûta and spent happy days, how Bharaṯa came upon him there and earnestly prayed him to come back unto his own; how he received the sad news of his father's death and offered libations of water unto his manes; how he gave his sandals unto Bharaṯa and prevailed upon him to go back; how Bharaṯa had them crowned and ruled in their name at Nanḏigrâma.

How Râma penetrated thereafter into the dark depths of Ḏaṉdaka and slew Virâḏha; how they came unto the hermitage of Anasûyâ, who presented Sîṯâ with a sandal paste and unguents of rare virtue; how Râma, paid his respects to Ṣarabhanga, Agasṯya, Suṯîkshṉa and Jatâyu and took up his abode at Pachhavatî; how the Râkshasî Ṣûrpanakhâ came upon them there and how Lakshmaṉa mutilated her of her nose and ears; how he slew, in fierce fight, Khara, Ḏûshaṉa and Ṯrisiras that came to avenge her, how Râvaṉa came over from Lankâ at the news, decoyed Râma and Lakshmaṉa through the wily Mârîcha and carried away Sîtâ, how Râma slew Mârîcha and raved at the loss of his wife; the death of Jatâyus; how the brothers came upon Kabanḏha who directed them unto Ṣabarî, how they reached the shores of the Lake Pampâ and from there proceeded to the hill of Rịshyamûka, where they made the acquaintance of Sugrîva; how Râma sware friendship with him and convinced him of his might; how Sugrîva fought his brother Vâli; how Râma slew the latter during the combat; the wild laments of Ṯârâ; the installation of Sugrîva; Râma's sojourn at the Prasravaṉa hill during the rains; how his wrath blazed forth against Sugrîva, who thereupon hastened to gather his countless hosts and despatched them to all quarters of the Earth, with minute description of every part of the same; how Râma entrusted Hanumân with his Signet Ring; how the monkeys lost their way into the cave of Rịksha, how they resolved to starve themselves to death; their meeting with Sampâṯi, the vulture, upon whose information, Hanumân took a leap across the sea, from the Mahênḏra mountains; how he met Mainâka on his way and slew Simhikâ; how he landed at nightfall on Mount Malaya, in Lankâ, and took counsel with himself, how he came upon Râvaṉa sleeping in his aerial car, Pushpaka, and upon his wives in the drinking-saloon; how he sought out Sîṯâ in the Asôka grove and gave her Râma's token; how Râvaṉa persecuted her with his love;

how the Râkshasî women threatened Sîṯâ; how Ṯrijatâ related unto her the dream she had; how Hanumân received from Sîṯâ her crest-jewel and destroyed the grove; how the affrighted women-guards took up the news to Râvaṉa; how Hanumân slew the hosts sent against him and became a willing captive to the Brahmâsṯra of Inḏrajiṯ; how he set the city on fire and roared for very joy; how he rejoined his companions and destroyed the honey-grove; bow he gave his lady's token to Râma and consoled him; how Râma proceeded with his forces to the shores of he ocean; how he promised refuge unto Vibhîshaṉa; how he caused Nala, the monkey, to throw a bridge across the mighty deep and led his hosts over it to Lankâ's isle; how he laid siege to it at night and aided therein by the counsels of Vibîshaṉa, laid low in fierce battle Inḏrajiṯ, Kumbakharṉa, Râvaṉa and the other Râkshasa heroes; how he took back Sîṯâ and had Vibhîshaṉa crowned as king of Lankâ; how he went back to Ayôḏhyâ in the magic car, Pushpaka, and met his brother Bharaṯa on the way; and how he was crowned king and sent back to their homes his countless friends and allies that came to the capital to be present on the happy occasion.

And in the Uṯṯarakâṉda has the poet described the coming years of Râma; his golden rule; how he cast away his queen to avoid popular censure, and everything that was to befall him in the unknown future.

CHAPTER IV.

KUSA AND LAVA SING THE RÂMÂYANA BEFORE RÂMA.

Vâlmîki, the prince of poets, composed the Life of Râmâ, when he was reigning at Ayôdhyâ, after his terrible wars with Râvana; and the Seer's eye bestowed on him by the Lotus-born One, aided him in that grand work of flawless diction.

The seven cantos are divided into 500 chapters, and contain 24,000 verses, (the Uttarakânda included). The Holy One, out of his matchless wisdom, included in it every thing that befell Râma in the distant past or was to in the remote future.

Having brought the tale to an end, he cast about for some one who would commit it to memory and carry it to the ears of men. As he thus mused and prayed to the Giver of all good to send him one who would accomplish his purpose, there came unto him two disciples, Kusa and Lava by name, clad in the garb of hermits, but princes by birth, and reverently touched his feet.

The twins had been brought up under his watchful care and were dear unto his heart; of sweet voice and melodious, they were gifted with a marvellous faculty of retentiveness, thorough masters of the Holy Writ and its branches, they were skilled in every art and science, lay or clerical, steadfast in righteousness and strong of heart, they were chosen by Vâlmîki as fit instruments of his noble purpose and unto these he taught his Great Epic, which he named 'Râmâyana' or 'Sîtâ Charitra' or 'Paulastya Vadha.'—a mighty repository of the priceless wisdom enshrined in the Vêdas. Sweet to recite and sweeter to sing, it gives perfect expression to every sentiment that moves the human breast—love, heroism, disgust, terror, pathos, wonder, mirth, calm, and fear.

They stored it within their hearts and in obedience to the dictates of their master, sang it to large concourses of Brâhmaṉas and warriors, sages and saints, in the three kinds of measure and to the sweet accompaniment of musical instruments. Divinely skilled in the science and art of song, golden-throated, equally adept at every musical instrument, they were thoroughly conversant with the origin and nature of notes, scales and pitches, and with the complex science of expression. Of surpassing loveliness, faultless in form and feature, they were the living counterparts of Ṣrî Râmachanḏra himself.

Through many a land they travelled and sang to many an audience; and on one occasion, before the sages that were enjoying their well-earned rest during the intervals of the Horse-sacrifice celebrated by Râma. With streaming eyes and ravished hearts did the Holy Ones listen to the recital and roused to the highest pitch of admiration, applauded them to the echo. Strangers to guile and envy, the simple souls praised in no mean terms the noble poem, the gifted author and the incomparable singers.

"What charming music! what sweetness and melody of verse! And then, the vividness of narration! We seem to live and move among old times and scenes long gone by."

The brothers themselves seemed to feel the sacred thirst of fame and excelling their previous efforts, they took their highest pitch and sang away the hearts of the listeners; for, the sound was an echo to the sense. And one among them rose up and made the singers a present of his waterpot; and another, no mean connoissieur of the noble art of poetry and music, gave them his hermit dress of bark.

Thus, many a time and oft, did these boys recite it in crowded halls and broad streets, in sacred groves and sacrificial grounds:

"A rare and noble epic this, the Râmâyaṉa" cried the hearers "of honeyed verses and faultless diction,

beautifully adapted to music, vocal or instrumental and charming to hear, begun and finished according to the best canons of the art, the most exacting critic cannot praise it too highly; the first of its kind and an unapproachable ideal for all time to come; the best model for all future poets, the thrice-distilled Essence of the Holy Scriptures, the surest giver of health and happiness, length of years and prosperity, to all who read or listen to it. And proficients as ye are in every style of music, marvellously have ye sung it."

It chanced one day that Bharata, the brother of Râma, heard them recite and failed not to inform the king of it. Râghava, the mightiest of men, invited the noble twins to the palace and showed unto them due respect; seated on the gem-encrusted throne of gold brought down by his sire from the high heaven of Indra and surrounded by his loving brothers and faithful ministers, he gazed long and fondly on the boys who were the exact images of himself and exclaimed to his wondering brothers. "Mark you the radiant glory that plays around them? Liker Gods than men! And the poem they recite, how wonderful in its suggestiveness! Listen we to it!"

And putting away all cares from his heart, he prepared himself to listen and directed the boys to commence. With voices of perfect accord and entrancing sweetness, faultless in note and measure, the brothers sang in melodious strains the following poem; and such the perfectness of expression and delicacy of execution, that the hearers followed them with their hearts and ears, and such the marvellous power of their song, that an indescribable sense of bliss gradually stole over them and pervaded their frame and every sense and faculty of theirs—strange, overpowering and almost painful in its intensity.

Then Râma addressed himself to those around him and said "Behold these young ascetics, of kingly form and mien! Rare singers they are and of mighty spiritual

energy withal. And the noble poem they recite, how sweet and solacing to my wounded heart, reft of my beloved! Fail not to accord it attention meet."

The boy-hermits, thus directed by the World-honored, set about to sing the Epic, in the Mârgî style of music; the soul-entrancing strains failed not to draw Râma from his lofty throne, to take his seat among the audience that he might better hear the gifted twins. Soon was he lost to everything around him and lived and moved but in the no distant past.

CHAPTER V.

AYÔḌHYÂ.

From the far-off times of Manu, the Divine Ruler, the mighty kings of the line of Ikshwâku held victorious and undisputed sway over the broad Earth and the seven islands that guard it around.

Of their race came king Sagara, at whose high command was dug the Ocean, dark and deep, by his sixty thousand sons that thronged around him as he marched along.

And this grand Epic, the Râmâyaṉa, of immortal fame, sings the lives and deeds of those mighty men of old. The devout reader thereof secures the four Aims of Life —Righteousness, Wealth, Happiness and Liberation. So give ear unto it with hearts free from Envy's taint.

The broad realms of Kôsala extend far away on either banks of the Sarayû. Rich in the wealth of flocks and herds, fertile fields and broad pastures, it forms the happy home of countless millions

And of that kingdom is Ayôḏhyâ the capital, famed of old through all the worlds, and fashioned in ages past by the royal hand of the Divine Manu.

Built on a level stretch of ground, well-watered and fertile, lovely groves adorn it and broad fields, where waves the golden corn.

Excellent roads, lined with branching trees, connect it with every part of the world. Her lofty walls measure twelve leagues from end to end and three from side to side. High are her ramparts and massive and lined with, numerous guns and every death-dealing engine ever invented by man's fertitle brain, and all around them, moats wide and deep. The city gates are large and strong and of exquisite workmanship ; and the impregnable fortifications justify its name, Ayôḏhyâ.

The high roads, planned perfectly straight unto the very gates of the city, are ever kept clean and well watered, and strewed with fragrant flowers. Laid out in even squares like a chess board, the broad and well kept roads branch out from the royal homes that grace the centre of the town.

Long lines of palatial shops adorn the merchant quarters, stored with the rarest works of nature and of art.

Charming villas and pleasure-grounds peep out from every lovely hill and eminence. Splendid mansions, flashing with gold and gems, rise in goodly row and meet the eye at every turn. Numerous flags and banners gaily wave over the roofs of the towering houses built on lofty platforms and gives one the idea of the radiant aerial cars of the happy ones who have won the abodes of the gods by the force of their religious merit.

Rich is it in horses and elephants, sheep and oxen, mules and camels. From every street are wafted to the ear the sweet sounds of lute or flute, drum or tabret, fife or clarion, Vîṇa or Sitâr. It is the happy home of bards and minstrels, poets and genealogists, sculptors and architects; and in the streets you are jostled at every step by the teachers of the art of dance and song, by the envoys of foreign kings and tributary princes and by princely merchants from far off lands, that come there to buy and sell. No art nor science, lay or otherwise, but finds there its best and brightest exponent and highest authority.

And Brâhmaṇas, straight of speech and pure of heart, bless the city with their presence and form the living stones in the Guardian Wall of Humanity. Profoundly versed in all the sacred lore, they ever tend the Fires and keep the observances; and in self-restraint and holy fervor, rank with the saintly Vasishtha and the like.

Great Car-warriors and god-like heroes, skilled in every art of war and chase, keep the city from the foe. With sharp weapons, but more often with their strong hands,

they rid the woods of many a wild beast, lion and tiger, boar and bear. Masters of every weapon, human and divine, they never strike the solitary foeman or the flying one ; they never attack any one from behind nor harm the only scion of his race.

And, over this best and fairest of cities reigned Ḏaṣa-raṯha, even as the Great Inḏra holds high sway over the Regions of the Gods.

CHAPTER VI.

ḌASARAṬHA.

And from this city, did king Ḍasaraṭha reign over his people, wisely and well, even as Manu, the Divine Ruler of men.

Wonderfully strong and hardy, he combined in himself the utmost grace and beauty of form. With his senses under perfect restraint and of subdued self, his innate glory was but thinly veiled by his vesture of flesh.

He was one of the noblest kings that ever reigned, an Aṯiraṯha among those that came of the mighty line of Ikshvâku. He was the terror of his foes and the joy of his friends and subjects, and his name and fame was a household word in all the worlds, high and low.

They that seek a saint laud him for holiness of life and spiritual fervor, and in his untold wealth of corn and grain, gold and gems, silk and wool, he rivalled Inḏra, the Monarch of the Gods or Kubêra, the Lord of Riches.

Profoundly conversant with every art and science of his age, lay or clerical, his joy lived in the weal of his kingdom. By liberal gifts, he attracted to himself the best and brightest of the land in the arts of war or peace, ever on the watch for an opportunity to extend his dominions, enlarge his armaments and increase the strength of his fortresses and garrisons, he was a past master of kingcraft and his schemes always read into the far future and anticipated the results.

Numerous sacrifices did he celebrate; and he never tired of providing for the welfare and comfort of his subjects, by countless works of public utility or recreation. Straight of heart and truthful of speech, he ever pursued the four Aims of Life at the right time and without clash. In a word, Inḏra the Mighty, ruled not over his Heavenly Realm with greater glory or ability.

And they to whom it was given to reside in that best of cities, were ever just and happy, generous and broad-hearted, truth-speaking and contented and well versed in every traditional lore and legend. You may search the city from end to end and never come across any one of limited means, poor in his stores of grain and corn, horses and cattle, for, poverty was a thing unknown among them. Nor can you see any one but was dressed in garments bright and clean and was adorned with ear-rings and necklaces, wreath and garland, perfumes and flowers, chain and bracelet. An atheist or an unlettered man or one of cruel instincts or a sensualist, or an Egoist was a sight unknown in that fair capital of Dasaratha. There was none who put his love of lucre before self and duty, father and mother, wife and child, brother and riend. All were godly in spirit, self-controlled, of clean lives and generous impulses and like unto the sages of yore in the utter purity of their lives. Nor could you lay your finger upon any one who was hunger-worn or low-spirited or gloomy of soul or mean of nature. Nor could your eye rest upon any one who cast longing looks on his neighbour's goods or goodly wife. Nor was the place defiled by a thief or a liar or an envious man, or a deformed person or ugly. Nor did the walls shelter any who was not the soul of loyalty, nor any one who knew not the means to secure his happiness here and hereafter, nor any one who sacrificed not to the Gods and to the Holy Fires.

The Brâhmanas there, embodied in themselves the loftiest ideals of the nation and in their rigid discharge of their complicated round of duties, led the way for the other classes to follow, studying and teaching, giving and receiving, undefiled by any sin that attaches thereunto. They counted among them none who did not tend the Holy Fires nor keep the observances; nor any one who had not mastered the Vêdas and its six branches.

The other orders of society were ever brave, truthful and righteous, kind and hospitable to the wayworn and the homeless, devout and reverential unto the Beings on high; ever grateful for kindnesses done and received, their days were long and happy, in the midst of their friends and relations, wives and children, sons and grandsons, even unto the furthest remove.

The warrior caste was ever fain to render due obedience to the counsel and behest of the Brâhmaṉas; the Vaiṣyas were proud to honor and obey the ruling class; and the Ṣûdras, the tillers of the soil, never swerved from their rule of life, but ever offered humble and cheerful service to their superiors.

Brave men and true ever kept watch and ward over the place; frank and open as a child, yet of terrible might; quick to feel and swift to retaliate, adepts in the use of every weapon and grown grey in the art of war, they were 'the heroes of a hundred fights.' And even as a lofty mountain-cave guarded by fierce lions, was this fair city rendered unassailable through the lion-hearted veterans, who fought and won, or lay with faces grim, turned still in death towards the despised foe. Such his troops.

Horses had he, millions of them, of noblest breed, drawn from the mountain fastnesses of Bâhlîka, Kâmbhôja or Vanâyu or from the sandy wastes of Sindh. Matchless they stood for grace and speed, even as the Ucchaiṣravas, the horse that Iṉdra bestrides.

The forests of the Viṉdhyâ and the heights of the Himâlaya supplied him with rare elephants. Of the stock of Airâvaṯa they came, of Mahâpaḏma, of Anjana and of Vâmana. Of vast bulk and height, they were ever in rut, like hills in motion. Bhaḏra, Manḏra, Mriga; Bhaḏra Manḏra, Bhaḏra Mriga, and Mriga Manḏra, every species was represented in his stables.

The terror of his well-appointed army allowed no enemy to approach within leagues of his capital and made it worthy of the name she bore—"The Impregnable."

And like unto Indra in might and glory, or even as the silvery Moon among the distant stars, did Ḍaṣaraṭha, the unconquered, rule over that fair Maiden City, strong in its fortifications and garrisons, and bright with its noble buildings and nobler men.

CHAPTER VII.

DASARATHA'S MINISTERS.

Ministers, eight in number, assisted the wise and warlike monarch in the government of his vast empire—Dhrishti, Jayanta, Vijaya, Siddhârtha, Arthasâdhaka, Asôka, Mantrapâla and Sumantra, Vasishtha and Vâmadêva were his spiritual guides, while Jâbâli and the rest took their place among his counsellors.

They were excellent readers of character, faithful and true, their thoughts, words and deeds ever in perfect accord; of subdued senses, of large private means, gifted with extraordinary intelligence, sweet-spoken, of honest fame and true to their promises even unto death, of unsurpassed valor and fortitude, they ever had their eye on everything that tended to the best interests of their master and was dear to his heart. Their time, their talents and their energies were devoted to he affairs of the state and they discharged their trust thoroughly and efficiently. Well-versed in the intricate science and art of polity, they would sooner die than stoop to a mean action or an unjust one. Famed for their never-failing patience and spiritual might, they would not utter an untruth from motives of anger or love or gain. Of considerable tact and knowledge of the world, they acquainted themselves through their spies with everything that took place in their country or abroad—past, present or in contemplation. Of well-tried friendship, they dealt out justice swift and meet, be it son or stranger, friend or foe.

Ever law-abiding, they safe-guarded the interests of the good and the righteous; their hand was ever heavy on the wicked and the impious, but was never lifted against the innocent, be he their worst enemy. Ever successful against the foes of the state and clever in foiling their deep-laid plans, they never let slip any occasion

of increasing the armaments of the kingdom and enriching its coffers, but withal, by fair and honest means, oppressing not the pious Brâhmanas and the valiant Kshatriyas. Every offender was punished and fined according to the magnitude of his offence and with due regard to his age and means, time and place.

Under the watchful eye of these faithful ministers who worked in perfect harmony, neither the capital nor the country was ever disgraced by a liar or a rogue or a goer after other women or an unrighteous man or a wicked one.

These excellent counsellors were ever tastefully dressed and adorned. With a constant eye to the best points of a man's character, they were renowned for their clear insight into the present and the future. While religiously guarding the secrets of the State, they were calm and cool in judgment and well conversant with the proper occasions of the four means of overcoming an enemy.

Through his gifted ministers, Dasaratha won over the hearts of his people and was ever informed of everything that took place at home or abroad. Of faultless character, his feet were ever set on the path of virtue and his heart ever turned away from the path of unrighteousness. No one sought his presence with a prayer and went away disappointed. His friends were numerous and true and his tributaries many; he bowed to none and acknowledged the yoke of none, and he met not any foeman worthy of his steel. His promises always fell short of the performance, and the rising Orb of Day shone not with greater glory in his golden halo of radiance, than did this king of men, with his noble ministers around him.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CHILDLESS KING.

Of unbounded fame and peerless virtue, king Dasaratha saw the chill winter of age mantling him in its white folds, without any offspring from his loins to cheer his last days.

> 'His manhood passing, left him lone,
> 'A childless lord, for this he grieved, for this
> 'Heavy observances he underwent,
> 'Subduing needs of flesh and oftentimes
> 'Making high sacrifice to the Gods,
> 'Where, all for food, at each sixth watch he took
> 'A little measured dole.'

He had tried every means that the Holy Books recommend, to free himself of this terrible curse of childlessness but in vain. In sheer desperation did he fling his arm on high and cry—

"Oh, ye just gods! Is there no way from this living death?"; and, as if in answer to his heart-cry, there flashed upon him a suggestion, "May be some unwitting sin of mine in the far past stands unwiped. Anyhow, let me celebrate the Horse-sacrifice that washes a man white of all sin and I may yet feel the flower-soft hands of innocent children clasp my aged neck around."

He took counsel of his queens—what greater joy to their barren hearts? Then, turning to Sumantra who ever stood by, like his good angel, he said, "Let my teacher and priestly guides know that I await their presence here." And when they were all before him—Vasishtha, the mighty, Suyagña, Vâmadêva, Jâbâli, Kâsyapa, and other Brâhmanas grown old in wisdom and sacred lore—the aged monarch honored them duly and spoke, "Sore am I of heart, from having no son to grace my name. My royal state and its hollow joys are as dust and ashes in my mouth. May be a Horse-sacrifice can remove the unknown obstacle that bars the way to the desire of my heart. What might be your view, reverend sirs?"

The Brâhmaṉas listened to his sweet words, so extremely consonant with the Aims of Life and warmly applauded his resolve: "Since your Majesty's heart is inclined to this virtuous and righteous course, this sacrifice cannot fail to accomplish your object.

'Thy piety, thy purity, thy fasts,
'The largesse of thy hands, thy heart's wide love,
'Thy strength of faith, have pleased us.'

Let the necessary arrangements be made for it and the consecrated horse be let loose."

Joy unspeakable spread over the sad heart of the old king and his face shone with a new light; he turned to his ministers and cried, "Place yourselves under the directions of the wise Vasishtha and get everything ready for the sacrifice. Start the consecrated horse on its holy round; let brave warriors go with it and saintly priests Raise the sacrificial grounds on the northern banks of the swift-coursing Sarayû. Have the necessary rites performed that the Kalpa Sûṯras lay down to ward off obstacles from foes seen and unseen. The spiteful Brahmarâkshasas are ever on the lookout to detect the slightest slip and spoil such holy rites; and a badly performed sacrifice bringeth evil unto the performer. But for such dangers and difficulties, every king would be only too glad to do it. Hence, be it on your heads that the sacrifice gets through without any hitch and as laid down in the Book of Ordinances. I entrust you with the task, for I know none more competent." "To hear is to obey" they replied.

The Brâhmaṉas gave him their blessings and withdrew from the council chamber. Ḏaṣaraṯha reiterated his directions to his ministers and dismissed them. He sought his beloved queens and said to them, "Preparations are on foot towards the sacrifice; consecrate yourselves accordingly." A joyful task was it to them and the faces of the lovely ones shone even as golden lotuses after a long and severe spell of frosty winter.

CHAPTER IX.

RISHYASRINGA—THE INNOCENT.

Then Sumantra, the charioteer of the king and one of his confidential ministers, sought his privacy and said, "Lord, it was given me to be present at an assembly of the Holy Ones, when Sanatkumâra, the Divine Celibate, spoke on the very subject alluded to by the learned Brâhmanas not long ago.

The divine Kâsyapa has a son, of unrivalled fame, by name Vibhândaka, and to him will be born a child, Rishyasringa so called. Spending all his days in the lonely forest, his life's sphere will for some years be confined to cheerful service upon his renowned father and reverential tending of the Sacred Fires, and then, his Bramhacharya will receive a violent shock.

It will come to pass that a famous king, Rômapâda, will rule over Anga. Some neglect of his kingly duties will inflict a drought in his dominions, entailing much misery on all beings therein, men and beasts. His heart bleeding at the sight of the suffering millions, he will send for Brâhmanas grown grey with age and wisdom and say 'Reverend sirs! you have sounded the depths of knowledge, lay and clerical and have a profound acquaintance with the world and its ways. Advise me some rite whereby this crime of mine may be expiated and the land be freed of this curse that sits upon it.' Then the Brâhmanas, conversant with the Holy Books, will reply 'Your Majesty! manage any way to get down here Rishyasringa, the son of Vibhândaka and give him your daughter Sântâ for a wife, and you will have rain.'

'How shall I compass it?' the king will say to himself 'well, the Brâhmanas alone know best how to bring down one of their class' and will beseech his chaplain and his ministers to go bring him the young ascetic.

With faces blanched with fear, they will cry out, 'Not so. Your Majesty will pardon us this unseemly refusal; but we dare not go. Vibhândaka's curse is too terrible to think of. But we will suggest to you another plan whereby you can bring his son down here without affecting his Brahmacharya and have rain.'

The king will follow their advice and get him down through courtesans and give him his daughter Sântâ for a wife. So said Sanatkumâra, and Rishyasringa, your son-in-law as well, will take the requisite measures to procure you an offspring."

Dasaratha drank in with eager ears the glad news and asked, "Well, Sumantra, how was it that Rômapâda induced Rishyasringa to leave his forest-home and visit his dominions?"

CHAPTER X.

RÎSHYASRINGA—THE INNOCENT—(*continued*)

Questioned thus, Sumantra went on, "The priests spoke to the king through his ministers, 'Follow our advice and you will have your wish. That ascetic has never been outside his native forests. The faithful discharge of his duties and the study of the Scriptures take up all his time. The face of woman is a new sight to him ; much less knows he her nature, her ways and her wiles, nor the liquid fire that her looks send along a man's veins. We will cloud his senses by sweet music, fine perfumes, delicious food, flowery soft touch and sights that captivate the eye and we are sure to bring him over here. Make up your mind to follow our plan. Send lovely courtesans on this business ; bribe them well by rich presents of silk and clothes, ornaments and money and they can never fail to have him at their heels.' 'Do as seems to you best' said the king to them ; and deeming it unseemly that they should hold any conversation with courtesans, they directed the ministers to give them the necessary instructions.

Accordingly the girls went to the forest and hung about the cottage of Vibhândaka, lying in wait for a chance to meet his son alone—the wise young man who rarely left his hermitage, so engrossed was he in attendance upon his father.

'In the woods he dwelled
'That sinless saint, pious and mild and pure,
'Sad-minded, solitary, for his eyes
'Had never lighted on a human face
'Except his sire, Vibhândaka's , and thus,
'Always young Rishyasringa's heart was set
'On sanctities.'

As fortune or misfortune would have it, that day he came out of his abode and to the very place where these

damsels had set a snare to entrap his unwary self. They joyfully approached him with bright looks of welcome and cooed to him with alluring smiles. 'Holy one, who art thou? And how is it that you have chosen to make this dark and dreary forest your home?'

> 'Take you joy to dwell
> 'All lonely in this hermitage?'

Their very forms and features were new to him and he obligingly replied, 'Lovely beings! I am the son of the holy Vibhândaka; and Rishyasringa he calls me. I have laid up no inconsiderable merit by my religious austerities. Yonder is my cottage and I would be extremely delighted to receive you there and give you the best welcome in my power."

The girls smiled their assent and went with him. There he offered them water to wash and drink, and delicious fruits and roots to eat. They received them with joyful thanks and desirous to leave the place before the terrible Vibhândaka returned, said to him, 'Fair Sir! you will not refuse to taste of the fruits we have brought for you.' They offered him every variety of sweet and toothsome delicacies, which he partook of with unfeigned delight and wonder, for never before had he seen such sweet and lovely fruits ·

> 'And at the last
> 'Danced to his side, and for a moment set
> 'Palm to his palm, and limb to limb, and lip
> 'To trembling lip, and breast to beating breast.'

The girls then took leave of him saying 'Holy Sir! allow us to depart to our homes; for we are close upon the hour of prayer and worship.'

And the young ascetic, his senses all in a whirl at the sight of their divinely beautiful forms, by the delicious sweetness of the fruits they gave him, by the subtle fragrance that their persons and dress exhaled, by the heart ravishing strains of their music and the dreamy languor of their looks and not the least by their passion-

ate kissés and embraces, that sent a stream of molten lava through his veins, found his life miserable away from them, and yearned for the moment when he would meet them again

‘He stood
‘As one some dream of glory leaves distraught,
‘Spiritless, then within his lonely cell
‘Sate, with his face fixed through many silent hours,
‘Their beauties meditating.’

After a time the restlessness that took possession of him drove him to the spot where he came upon them the day before and with eager eyes he scanned the road they took.

They failed him not and having made sure that they had lured him into their man-trap, said to him laughingly ‘Light of our eyes! you do us a great injustice in that you do not return our visit to you. Come and see us where we live. You will find there nicer fruits than those we give you yesterday. And you can be sure of a warmer welcome at our hermitage.’

He took their words for gospel truth and only too glad was he to go with them The moment his feet touched the soil of Anga,

‘Great Indra's wrath was gone and the rain
‘Burst over the land and drenched the thirsty fields.’

And the people rejoiced thereat. The king met his welcome visitor that brought with him the much-prayed-for rains and reverentially touching his feet with his head, said with joined palms, ‘Holy One! May an unworthy servant of thine sue for pardon for having induced thee by an unworthy ruse to visit my kingdom? May he pray of thee to save him from the terrible wrath of thy saintly sire?’ Rishyasringa did not disappoint him, and Rômapâda took him to his palace and joyfully gave him his daughter, Sântâ, for a wife. The sage abode with him thereafter, his least wishes anticipated and every desire of his heart gratified.

CHAPTER XI.

DASARATHA AND RISHYASRINGA

'Of the illustrious line of Ikshwâku will spring a righteous monarch, by name Dasaratha, who aye kept his plighted word. Rômapâda, the lord of Anga, and a very dear friend of Dasaratha, will be blessed with a daughter, Sântâ so named, whose loveliness will be matched only by her virtue. And to him will the ruler of Ayôdhyâ go and say, 'Oh, my dear friend! my heart danceth not to the happy music of boyish prattle and innocent laughter Speak thou to Rishyasringa for me and request him to go out to my capital to devise some rite whereby

'I may have
Fair babes, continuers of my royal line

And Rômapâda, taking counsel but with his own generous heart, will persuade Rishyasringa and Sântâ to go over with his friend, assured beyond a doubt that his son-in-law will not fail to gladden the old king's heart by realising his long-cherished wishes. Whereupon Dasaratha will, in all humility, pray to the sage to take the necessary steps to free him of his curse of childlessness and secure him a place in the Regions of the Blessed. Rishyasringa will not fail him and four sons of immeasurable might and boundless fame will call the happy Dasaratha their sire and continue his line on earth for long ages to come.'

Thus spoke the Divine One, even Sanatkumâra, for whom the past, the present, and the future have no secrets; and it was in the last Kritayuga. Now I suggest that your Majesty will do well to go to the sage in person, you and your friends, kinsmen, armies and attendants; offer him your humblest respects and entreat him to go over with you."

So spake the favoured one; whereat Dasaratha took thoughtful counsel with Vasishtha and set out for the

dominions of Rômapâḏa. They had a long and pleasant journey through happy villages and laughing fields, over high hills and dark valleys, through trackless woods and across roaring waters and arrived at the capital of the king, who gave a hearty welcome to his old friend, his queens and his ministers.

With pride and joy, he lost no time in acquainting Rishyasringa with the warm friendship that existed between him and Ḏasaratha and with the relation Sânṯâ occupied to him The sage honoured him duly as the father of his dear wife; and the ruler of Ayôḏhyâ could not take his wondering eyes off the young Rishi, whose spiritual lustre blazed even as the smokeless flame

A week or so of happy hospitality and the childless king sought the privacy of Rômapâḏa and said "My old friend and true! I would like that you allow me to take away Sânṯâ and her husband to Ayôḏhyâ. They would serve a great purpose of mine."

"Glad am I" exclaimed Rômapâḏa, "in that you have at last found something that I can do for you"; and taking his son-in-law aside, he said to him, "My valued friend Ḏasaratha, my other self, wants you and your wife to stay with him awhile at his place; and it will gladden my heart ever so much if you could do so." "Nothing would give me greater pleasure," was the answer of the sage, accompanied with an enigmatic smile.

And the lord of Ayôḏhyâ, now all haste to go back to his capital, embraced Rômapâḏa warmly and took reluctant leave of him, with a promise to meet at no long time. He set his face towards Ayôḏhyâ and calling unto his presence swift messengers, "Go ye," said he, "in advance and see to it that the city puts on her brightest look. Let the roads be swept clean and the dust laid. Let the streets and houses be gaily decked with flags, streamers, banners, and garlands. Let arches welcome us at every turn and sweet perfumes sail along the soft breeze."

And Dasaratha entered Ayôdhyâ to the sweet sounds of martial music and the joyful shouts of the people, dressed in their brightest and their best, who gave a hearty welcome to their beloved monarch and his honoured friend. The royal host offered unto his reverend guest the highest honours of his house and led him to the inner apartments, while his old heart danced with joy, as if its long-deferred hopes were already realized to the utmost. His ladies were overjoyed to have Sântâ once more among them after so long an absence, while she, happy in the unfeigned love of her friends and kinsfolk and of her royal father, abode with him for a while, ever devotedly ministering to the comforts of her saintly husband

CHAPTER XII.

THE HORSE-SACRIFICE RESOLVED UPON.

Spring came on, never too soon, the brightest jewel that ever shines in the crown of the Lord of Months. And upon Ḏaṣaraṯha came the desire to perform the sacrifice, in whose womb lay his future, his joys, his hopes, his peace here and hereafter. He concluded to go through the horse-sacrifice as a necessary preliminary and purificatory rite and with folded palms prayed Ṟishyaṣṟingâ of golden lustre, to accept the office of Brahma during the preparatory Sângrahaṉî "Be it so," replied the sage, "make the necessary arrangements and let the sacrificial horse go his round over the earth."

Ḏaṣaraṯha turned to Sumanṯra and said "Reverently invite to the holy rite Suyagña, Vâmaḏêva, Jâbâli, Kâṣyapa, Vasishtha, our royal chaplain and other Brâhmaṉas skilled in the mysteries of the sacrifices and convey them here on suitable vehicles, ;" which he did. The king honored them as they deserved and spake "Reverend Sirs! Sore is my spirit, in that my old age is not blessed with a child to climb upon my knees. I shall perform a horse-sacrifice to expiate this sin of mine, conscious or otherwise, that frustrates for me my dearest hopes and wishes." Vasishtha and his friends applauded the righteous resolve and replied · "Since thy heart is righteously inclined towards this rite, thou shalt, of a surety, be blessed with four sons of mighty arms and matchless fame. So, lose no time in making the necessary arrangements therefor."

Ḏaṣaraṯha turned to his ministers and said "See that the directions of my teacher are carried out to the very letter. Let everything be in readiness to begin the rite and loose the sacrificial horse to go his round, with skilled priests and a strong army to accompany it. Lay out the sacrificial grounds on the northern bank of the Sarayû

and have the necessary protective rites performed. If these sacrifices could be conducted easily and without any mishap, every king would but too gladly lay claim to the honour. But, cunning Brahma-râkshasas are ever on the watch to detect any slight flaw in these rites and it is not an easy thing to baffle their vigilance, skilled as they are in the sacrificial mysteries. I pray you, than whom I know none more competent, to enable me to perform this sacrifice of mine without a hitch and in conformity with the rules laid down for the same." "On our heads and eyes be it," they made low reply

The Sângrahaṉi was over, the horse let loose; and the assembled Brâhmaṉas were loud in their praises of the good king, whose heart was ever set on Ḏharma. They then took leave of the happy Ḏasaraṯha, who reiterated his orders to his ministers and retired to his apartments.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HORSE-SACRIFICE BEGUN.

A year passed by and Spring gladdened again the hearts of men; and on the full moon day, Dasaratha went to the sacrificial grounds to begin the Horse-sacrifice. He bowed himself low before Vasishtha, even unto the ground and said to him in all reverence, "Holy One! thou art my guide, philosopher and friend. Thy words are a lamp unto my feet and a light upon my path. I pray thee to perform for me this sacrifice duly and without the least flaw. No room should be given to the evil-minded Râkshasas to interfere with it, the materials, the rites or the deities. On thee rests the responsibility of this grand rite." "Well, it shall be even as you desire," rejoined Vasishtha.

He then sent for Brâhmanas, skilled in the performance of every kind of sacrifice, for the officers of the king and for the servants placed at his disposal to collect the materials therefor, for the makers of the sacrificial bricks and altars; for the carpenters, who prepare sacrificial posts, ladles, spoons, pots and other implements; for the diggers of tanks and wells; for skilled accountants, for painters, sculptors and architects, for professors in the art of dancing and pantomime, and for priests deep in the mysteries of sacrificial art, learned and of pure lives; and said to them, "Oh priests, watch ye every detail of the sacrifice and see that nothing goes amiss. Bricklayers! get ready hundreds and thousands of sacrificial bricks. Servants! erect mansions to receive and accommodate the royal guests, broad and high, proof against wind and rain; and charming residences for the Brâhmanas, for our townsmen and for those that come from the various parts of our vast kingdom. Look to it that these are amply stored with provisions of every kind, sweet and wholesome, and with every other requirement.

And you, officers of the king! take good heed that you receive every one kindly and honor him duly with garlands and sweet perfumes. Forget not the masons, the sculptors, the architects, the servants and those that are set to supervise these arrangements. Never show them the slightest sign of disrespect or neglect, but extend unto every one your heartiest welcome. Entertain them right royally and let them have everything they want, food, clothing and money. Keep your eye on every class of men and let it be upon your heads that they go away mightily satisfied. Beware, I say, of offending any one, be he the lowest of the low, through anger, enmity, familiarity or avarice. Ever keep before your minds the love you bear to me and to your king and deserve the same at our hands, by dicharging your respective duties to your utmost, and without the slightest room for complaint or remark."

And they all replied with one voice, "Holiest of sages! Upon our heads be your orders; we shall carry them out to the very letter."

Vasishtha then turned himself towards Sumantra and said, "Send out respectful invitations to every righteous king on the face of the Earth and to the men of note in all grades of society. Do thou request in person the gracious presence of the valiant Janaka, the lord of Mithila, bound to our king by ties of relationship, and deep in the knowledge of the Vêdas and the Sâstras; of the sweet spoken Lord of Kâsî, also a dear friend of Dasaratha; of the ruler of Kêkaya, our king's father-in-law and a paragon of virtue, and his son, and last, but not the lest, of the thrice fortunate Rômapâda, the glorious king of Anga, one of the dearest friends of our master; and send thou to invite hither the kings of Sindhu, Sauvîra, Saurâshtra and of the numerous kingdoms in the south, east and west and every other royal friend of our monarch."

And Sumantra did so.

Then, the officers and servants deputed by Vasishtha to look after the various details of the sacrifice, reported unto

him that they had done their work skilfully and thoroughly. Vasishtha dismissed them with this last piece of advice and—warning. "Whatever you give, give it with a cheerful heart and a pleasant smile. An ungracious gift brings evil upon the giver—our king. Remember and fail not."

In a short time the kings of the Earth came to the capital of Dasaratha with valuable presents of costly gems and articles rare. Then Vasishtha addressed himself to the king and said, "Noble king! the rulers of the Earth are come unto your sacrifice, every one of them, and I have received them right royally. Your officers have made every necessary arrangement for the rite. The sacrifical grounds are ready to receive your Majesty and resemble the happiest creations of celestial architects. May it please your Majesty to come and have a look at them?"

And, at an auspicious moment, Dasaratha set out for the sacrificial grounds along with Vasishtha and Vâmadêva. Then began the great Horse-sacrifice, under the watchful eye of Vasishtha, Rishyasringa and the other sages, who saw that nothing went amiss.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HORSE-SACRIFICE (*Concluded*)

The horse, that was sent to make the round of the earth, came back safe and victorious. And on the sacrificial grounds erected on the banks of the Sarayû, priests, who had sounded the depths of the Vêdas, went through the rites of Pravargya, Upasada, and other incidental offerings, as laid down in the Mîmâmsa and the Srauta Sûtras. They adored the Gods that preside over the various details of the sacrifice; during the morning Savana, they invited Indra to partake of his portion of the offering and hymned high the sin destroying Sôma; and the two other Savanas were properly gone through in their turn.

Every part of the great sacrifice was performed without any defect or interruption; the priests omitted nothing, they altered nothing, the Mantras were chanted without any fault of measure or intonation

And all the days the sacrifice went on, you could come upon none who was afflicted with fatigue, hunger or thirst, nor an unlettered man; nor one but had a hundred disciples. The Brâhmanas, the sages, the sky-clad, the old, the infirm, the sick, the boys and the women were ever seen feeding heartily. The viands were so sweet and delicious that, no sooner you rose full from a meal than the desire came upon you to sit down to it again, and you regretted the limited capacity of your stomach. The king was feeding countless millions, but he was never satisfied and ever blamed himself for his inability to give more. So, he gave directions to the superintendents that in every part of the vast grounds food and clothing should be distributed, without stint, to those that might ask for it. In the numerous kitchens the cooks piled up day after day huge hills of food of every kind; they were marvels of the culinary art and very

soon disappeared down the joyful throats of the untold millions that came from the various quarters of the earth to view that famous rite. And Brâhmaṉas, neatly dressed and gaily decked, served the guests, while many others assisted them. They rose from the meal all too reluctantly and praised in no measured terms the excellence of the feast and the well appointed service. "Our delight and joy knows no bounds, your majesty!" cried they, "may every happiness be thine." And the words were sweet unto his ears.

During the intervals of the sacrifice, Brâhmaṉas of great learning and high powers of speech, entered into various polemical discussions with one another, with a view to win laurels on that memorable occasion.

On each day of the sacrifice, during the three Savanas, Brâhmaṉas skilled in the spreading of the sacred grass, conducted the rites presided over by Umâ and the other deities. Among those that took part in the sacrifice, there was none who was not a master of the Vêḏas and the Vêḏângas, nor any who had not kept the Chânḏrâyaṉa and the other vows; nor one who had not a profound and varied acquaintance with the Ṣâsṯras; nor could your eye rest in the king's audiaece on any Brâhmaṉa who was not an able disputant.

And when they came to that part of the sacrifice where the sacrificial posts were planted, they drove into the ground twenty one posts at arm's length from one another, near the altar place of Agni. A post of Ṣlêshmâṯaka, with another of Ḏêvaḏâru to the north and south of it; again, three Bilva posts north and south of the first three; and again three mahogany posts north and south of these fifteen. They were made of tough flawless wood, each five hundred and four inches long and octagonal in shape. They were smoothly planed; and Brâhmaṉas well versed in the theroy and the art of sacrifice, decked them with bands of gold, flowers, perfumes and rich cloths. Planted in rows of seven, they looked not unlike the constellation of the Great Bear.

Before they were planted, skilled Brâhmaṉas laid out the fire-altar of bricks specially prepared according to the Sûṯras; it was eighteen stones high and shaped like the Garuda, facing the East, with spread tail and wings adorned with golden plates.

To the posts were bound, as enjoined in the rules of sacrifice, serpents and birds dedicated to Indra and to the other deities. And on the occasion of the offering up of the animals, the consecrated horse and about three hundred other animals were tied to the posts—land-living and aquatic, tame and wild, beasts of the wood and fowls of the air.

On the spot known as Sâmiṯra, (slaughtering-ground) the queens of Ḏasaraṯha sprinkled the dead horse with consecrated water, reciting the appropriate Manṯras, went round it right and left, and with a gold needle marked on its stomach the three places for the priests to cut at. Then, Kausalyâ, with a view to lay up great merit, abode for a night with the horse and felt no repugnance at touching the carcass.

The chief priests Brahma, Hoṯâ, Aḏhwarayu and Uḏgâṯa took by the hand the Mahishî, Vâvâṯa, Pâlâkalî, and Parivriṯî, given them as presents by the king and handed them back to him, receiving rich gifts in exchange.

Thereafter, the Aḏhwaryu cut out that part of the horse known as Ṯêjinî, that corresponds to the Vapâ of other animals and offered it to the God of Fire on plaited water-reeds. The king smelt of the smoke and his sins were washed away; and after him, the eleven other priests offered into the fire with appropriate rites the various parts of the horse.

The horse-sacrifice extends over many days and includes several complicated rituals, of which three are the most important. On the first day, the Agnishtôma, with four Sṯômas; on the second, the Ukṯhya; on the third, the Aṯirâṯra; and the remaining days were given up to Jyoṯishtôma, Âyushtôma, the two Aṯirâṯras, Abhi-

jiṯ, Visvajiṯ and Apṯôryama; and every one of them, in strict conformity with the rules laid down for it and with heart-felt good will to the performer.

Thus did Ḏasaraṯha perform this grand sacrifice, revealed to the world by Brahma, successfully and without omitting the least detail; and with a glad heart did he present the Hôṯâ, the Aḏhwaryu, the Brahma and the Uḏgâṯâ with his dominions on the East, West, South and North respectively. They accepted them joyfully and said to the king, "Your Majesty! religious observances, the study of the Holy Writ and the teaching thereof come easier to us and are more congenial than the government of kingdoms. What shall we do with them? You are fitted for the task and God has specially placed you in the world therefor. So, take these back and give us in return gold and gems, horses and cattle." And Ḏasaraṯha gave to every one of them ten lacs of kine, ten crores of gold coins, and four of silver, which they took to Rishyasringa and Vasishtha to equitably divide among them. They received their shares gladly and said to the king, "We are more than satisfied."

Ḏasaratha distributed untold wealth among the poor; and a Brâhmaṉa, who made bold to approach him with a request for something more, was rewarded with the diamond bracelet on his arm With tears of joy coursing down his aged cheeks, the monarch reverently touched the ground with his forehead before the assembled multitudes, whose contentment and joy knew no bounds, while the priests and the Brâhmaṉas spoke their heart-felt blessings in the grand and majestic chants of the Vêḏic hymns.

The heart of the old king danced with joy in that he had successfully performed the famous horse-sacrifice, so difficult for ordinary monarchs. It burnt away the sins that stood in the way of his being blessed with an offspring and opened to him wide the gates of heaven. He then approached Rishyasringa and prayed to him

with joined palms, "Holy Sir! deign to point out to me the means whereby I could have a child to cheer my old age."

"Let not thy noble heart be cast down," replied the sage. "Four sons will be born unto you, whose eternal glory will illumine your noble line. And mine be the care to bring about the happy event."

CHAPTER XV.

THE GODS TAKE REFUGE WITH THE LORD.

Then, Rishyasringa, whose mind was capacious enough to receive and retain the numerous Sâkhâs of the Vêdas and who was a thorough master of the mysteries connected therewith, after long and earnest thought, hit upon the most effective method of realising the king's wishes. With a glad face he turned to him and said, "Now shall I perform for you an Ishti consecrated by the Atharvana Mantras, that will not fail to get you a son." And in the course of the rite, he made an offering in the fire, accompanied by powerful Vêdic Mantras.

Meanwhile, the various Angelic Presences that came down to the horse-sacrifice to receive their portions of the offerings, approached their chief, the Lotus-born One, and said, "Lord! A Râkshasa, Râvana by name, has won your favour by his wonderful austerities and has been blessed with many mighty boons in consequence, and *we*, poor souls, have to pay for it. Bound by our respect for the giver of those boons, we have to put up, without a murmur, with his unheard-of cruelties. The three worlds tremble at his name; he will, in no time, drive away from their thrones Indra and the other Regents of the spheres and occupy them himself. Strong in the strength of his boons, he bids defiance to every one, sages and Brâhmanas, Yakshas and Gandharvas, Dêvas and Asuras and grinds them low. The Sun draws in his heat when he shines on the Demon and adjusts his warmth to his taste; the Wind-God is afraid to blow hard through his gardens, lest the flowers therein should fall off the trees and creepers and anger Râvana when he is disporting himself there; the roaring Ocean with his mutinous waves, stands tongue-tied with fear at his approach; his fierce looks strike dire terror into our hearts and we drag on lives of misery and fear. Seek thou some means to relieve us from this living terror."

"Shining Ones!" replied Brahma, "the wicked wretch prayed of me immortality from the Dêvas, the Gandharvas and the Râkshasas and *that* I granted him. But, fortunately for you, he has omitted to ask it from men, as being too far beneath his fear and notice. *There* is his weak point and he should be made to meet his death at the hands of man."

The hearts of the sages and the gods danced for very joy at this glad news, and they rejoiced as if the hour of their deliverance was already at hand.

Then there appeared before their delighted eyes the Lord Vishnu, the ruler of the Universe and the living God in the hearts of all beings. In His supreme effulgence stood He, His face resplendent with the thought that the time had come for Him to destroy the wicked and bring peace and comfort to the hearts of the good and the righteous. He ever bears in His hands the conch and the discus, to extend His protection to those that take refuge in Him. Brahma advanced to reverence Him, his mind actively engaged with the prayer he meant to place before Him. Then the Sons of Light hymned Him high and with bent heads and joined palms cried, "We pray Thee that Thou deign to be born as four sons unto Dasaratha, of righteous heart and saintly life—the Lord of Ayôdhya, from whom none ever ask in vain. Do Thou take human form through his three queens, who are even as the mortal embodiments of Hrî, Srî and Kîrti, and destroy the impious One, even Râvana. He is the scourge and the terror of all beings and is not to meet his death at the hands of any but man. Proud of his might and prouder still of the boons he had won of Brahma, he tramples on all of us, gods and sages, Yakshas and Gandharvas, Kinnaras and men alike. The lovely Apsarasas that disport themselves in the charming groves of our Nandana are the special objects of his persecutions. We, the denizens of the three worlds, pray his death at Thy hands and take our refuge in Thee. Thou art our only stay and support, and

we pray that Thou wilt be pleased to come down on Earth to destroy the wicked wights, Râvaṉa, Inḏrajiṯ, Lavaṉa and certain wicked Ganḏharvas."

Then, unto the expectant Brahma and the attendant celestial host, spake the World-honoured One, Vishṉu, the Lord of Lords, "Fear not, my children. All good betide you. I shall come down among men as the son of Ḏaṣaraṯha and shall slay in dreadful battle Râvaṉa, that terror of yours and of every devout and virtuous soul; nay, his sons, grandsons, friends, and kinsmen even unto the last remove. And mortal years 11000 shall I reign over the Earth, restoring Law and Order."

He promised them safety from their enemy and a speedy deliverance to their miseries; and resolved to manifest Himself as the sons of Ḏaṣaraṯha, whose saintly virtues attracted Him to take birth in his family. Far, far above the mortal changes known as birth and death, Himself the Goal and the End of all desires and efforts, human and divine, yet He made up His mind to limit His illimitable essence and come down into this dark and sinful world of ours, that the 'wicked might cease from troubling and the weary be at rest.'

Then, the Shining Ones, the Ganḏharvas, the Ruḏras and the Apsarasas, sang his divine glory and repeated their prayer, "Soul of Compassion! Lord of infinite Mercy! save us from the wrath and oppression of the terrible Râvaṉa, slay him in battle dire, him and his kin, him and his countless hosts. Naturally endowed with no inconsiderable degree of pride and might, he has become insufferably so, through the boons conferred on him by Brahma. The good and the righteous cry out against him and raise tear-dimmed eyes and trembling hands in mute appeal to Thee for deliverance and protection. Thy work accomplished, come Thou back, light of heart, unto Thy radiant seat on high, far beyond the utmost dreams of poor we, unto Vaikuṉtha, the eternal world where desire is not nor hatred."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DIVINE PÂYASA.

To which the Lord Nârâyana replied in feigned ignorance (what is it He knows not!) "Well, my children, I shall do even as you wish. But I do not see clearly the easiest and most effective method of bringing about his death. You have thought over it long and deeply, and may be you can suggest the best course."

The Dêvas bowed low before the Eternal One and rejoined, "Lord! the sinful wretch contrived to win the favour of Brahma, the foremost and the best of us all; who, pleased by his terrible austerities, granted him immunity from death at the hands of every one in all the worlds, above and below. But, he has, in the height of his contempt, omitted men from his list. Safe, through his boons, from every object in the universe, as he fondly thinks, his pride is equalled but by his cruelties. The groans of the insulted Dêvas and the shrieks of the ravished damsels cry out against him and the bleached skeletons of holy sages, whom he had murdered in cold blood. *Man and man alone* is his fate; and from *him* he meets his death. Do Thou take human form and slay him in battle dire."

Then said the Lord Vishnu, "I shall come down among men, as the son of Dasaratha, who is even now performing a holy rite to get a boy in his old age." He ended and having given leave to the assembled celestial hosts to depart, vanished then and there, lauded by the rejoicing Dêvas.

Soon after, Rishyasringa, in the course of the rite he was conducting, made an offering unto the Fire Âhavanîya, when there rose out of it a radiant Presence of vast proportions. Like a towering peak he stood; and the blazing Fire or the noonday sun was as nothing before the blinding glory of that mighty One. His face was fiery red

and the hair upon it was of the hue of molten gold, even as the tawny mane of the monarch of the forest. Clad in robes of reddish black, his beautifully proportioned limbs were adorned with lovely ornaments. Of inconceivable might and power, even as the royal tiger in the flush of his strength and fierceness, his voice sounded as the great war drums that fill the warrior's heart with fire and energy. His hands were closed around a golden vessel of exquisite workmanship, silver-covered, as lovingly as ever a lover's arms were twined round the neck of his beloved; and this was full of divine Pâyasa. He turned to the king and said, "I am a man sent to you by the Four-faced One, Brahma"

Ḏaṣaraṯha replied with folded hands, "Lord! Hast thy journey hither been a pleasant one? What does my lord want with his servant?"

"Only this," said the Radiant One, "the gods are pleased with thee and thy Horse-sacrifice and Puṯrêshti and have sent thee this Pâyasa. It confers glory and weal and, more than anything else, the son you so much yearn for. Accept it; let your queens partake of it and sons four shall be thine. This is what you have toiled for, ever so long, through horse-sacrifice and vows innumerable."

"Thy commands shall be obeyed," replied the king, in awe and reverence; and receiving the Pâyasa sent him by the Ḏêvas, he bowed low unto the Divine Messenger and went round him in respect; and his heart leaped for very joy, even as that of a beggar that has come upon a precious treasure. And the mighty Being, having accomplished his mission, disappeared into the fire from which he sprang.

Thereafter, the king concluded the rite, and retiring to his apartments, said to his queens, "This divine Pâyasa, the gift of the celestials, will bear you sons. Do you partake of it." And their faces shone thereat, even as the sky illuminated by the rays of the autumn moon.

He then distributed it among them thus:—One-half to Kausalyâ, one-fourth to Sumitrâ and one-eighth to Kaikêyî. But, to give the remaining one-eighth to her would be to place her on a level with Sumitra, her elder, and that should never be; so he divided it equally between the two. The queens were highly satisfied with his distribution of the Pâyasa and deemed themselves blessed in being allowed to partake of it. They ate of it and shone brighter throughout the period of pregnancy than the smokeless fire or the brilliant sun. And the old king, saw it; his heart was lifted of its weight of sorrow and he rejoiced even as the great Indra, honoured in heaven by the Siddhas and the Sages.

CHAPTER XVII

THE COMING DOWN OF THE GODS.

When the Lord Vishnu had taken the preliminary steps to come down as the son of Dasaratha, the Lotus-born One, from whom the future is not hid, said to the Dêvas, "The Lord goes down among men in pursuance of His promise to us and for our good. Send ye down, from your essences, sons to assist Him in His fight with Râvana; choose ye fit vehicles among the Apsarasas and Gandharvas and beget sons ape-like in form. Capable of assuming any shape at will they shall be masters of the arts of illusion, like unto the Wind-God in speed and unto the Supreme Vishnu in might, invulnerable and unconquerable, with the strength of fierce lions in them and endued with the terrible energy of all the Astras, immortal, even as the celestials who have drunk of Ambrosia, intelligent, conversant with every rule of morality and skilful in adopting the means to the ends.

"Once, when I indulged in a deep yawn, I brought forth a mighty bear, Jâmbavân by name, of course with an eye to future contingencies."

And in cheerful obedience to his commands, the sages, the Siddhas, the Vidyâdharas, the Uragas, the Châranas and the other celestial orders, brought forth sons of their own essence, monkeys that roamed the woods. The great Indra gave birth to Vâli, the monarch of the monkeys, of vast proportions even as the Mount Mahêndra. The Sun-God begat Sugrîva; Brihaspati begat Târa, the wisest and the foremost of the monkey host; Kubêra begat Gandhamâdhana, like unto him in wealth; Visvakarma begat Nala; Agni begat Nîla, radiant even as his sire and excelling the other monkeys by his glory, splendour and valor; the handsome Aswins begat Mainda and Dwivida, no less beautiful than their sires; Varuna begat Sushêna; Parjanya, the God of Rain, begat Sarabha, of vast strength;

Vâyu begat Hanumân, like unto Garuda in speed and of adamantine body, impervious even to the Vajra.

Thus, countless myriads of apes, baboons, monkeys and bears came down on Earth to assist the Lord in exterminating Râvana and his wicked brood. Their strength was immeasurable; they could take any form they liked; of vast bulk like unto Mêru or Mandara, resembling their sires in shape and height, some were born of monkey mothers, some of bears, some of Apsarasas, some of Vidyâdhara maidens and some of Nâgas and Gandharvas; some were born of celestial fathers, some of sages, some of Gandharvas, some of Garuda and the feathered race, some of Yakshas, some of Vâsuki and the others of Nâgas; some of Siddhas, some of Vidyâdharas and some of Uragas.

Proud in their strength even as lions and tigers, fighting with rocks, trees, teeth and claws, they could shatter the strongest tree and uproot the hugest mountain, their speed was such that the mighty Lord of the Rivers, was shaken to his very bottom; with a blow of their feet they could rend the solid Earth in twain; they could lightly leap across the vast oceans, course along the sky and catch by the hair the fleet-footed clouds; they could fly away in sport with huge elephants that range the forests in the pride of their strength; their roars could cause the most powerful birds to drop down dead from their dizzy home among the clouds.

These mighty beings ranged the earth and the sky, and their seed grew and grew by hundreds and by thousands and covered the face of the globe. Some of them lived along the sides of Rikshavân and other mountains, in dark forests and lonely woods, on the banks of charming lakes and swift-coursing rivers, on the high hills and in the low vales.

All of them recognised as their monarchs, the brothers Vâli and Sugrîva, the king and the heir-apparent, born of Indra and Sûrya; their leaders were Nala, Nîla, Hanumân

and other mighty monkeys. Vâli extended his powerful arm over them and under its shadow lived, in peace and prosperity, the high-minded and valiant apes and monkeys, bears and baboons. And these mighty beings, of various shapes and features, and of vast and fearful bulk, like unto huge mountain peaks or cloud-banks, came down into the world to help the Lord in His noble task and darkened the broad bosom of the Earth, and its numerous mountains and valleys, hills and dales, forests and woodlands.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE COMING OF THE LORD

The various celestial hosts that came down to receive their offerings during the Horse-sacrifice departed to their respective worlds after the Ishti was over.

The king and his queens freed themselves from the consecratory vow; and he sent away, with all honors, the many kings that had graced him with their presence. They saluted Vasishtha and the other sages and left for their respective kingdoms, their troops flashing with gold and gems and gay apparel, the royal gift of their noble host.

Dasaratha returned to his capital, in the company of Vasishtha and his brother sages, his queens, his armies and his servants following him in their countless conveyances. Then Rishyasringa and his wife took leave of Dasaratha and along with them Rômapâda. Having dismissed his guests, the king abode in his capital, his hopes realised and his thoughts ever intent on the approaching birth of his sons.

Twice six months had rolled away since the great sacrifice was over and, in the first month of the New Year, on the ninth day of the bright fortnight, the Lord of the worlds chose to take human form and sent down half of His essence as the son of Kausalyâ (thenceforth to be known as Râma), the world-honored One, the crowning glory of the grand line of Ikshwâku, and the sum of all perfections. The constellation Punarvasu, of which Aditi was the regent, was chosen to preside at his birth. The Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn were in ascension in their respective houses. Aries, Capricornus, Cancer, Pisces and the Libra, Jupiter and the Moon were in conjunction; the rising sign was Cancer. And Kausalyâ shone with unparalleled effulgence, even as Aditi

when she gave birth to Indra, the lord of the Shining Ones, the Vajra-wielder.

Bharata was born of Kaikêyî, under the constellation Pushya, when Pisces was the rising sign. He had in him one-eighth of the Divine Essence, and was the embodiment of every excellence, and of never-failing prowess.

Under the asterism Aslêsha, when Cancer was the rising sign, were born unto Sumitra two sons, Lakshmana, and Satrughna, valiant and well-skilled in the science of arms, human and divine. They were twins; Lakshmana had in him one-fourth and Satrughna one-eighth of the Divine Essence. Resembling in lustre the two asterisms Pûrva and Uttara Bhâdrapada, they were beautifully matched.

Sweetly sang the Gandharvas, and gaily danced the Apsarasas, the celestial drums beat merrily and the flowers of Heaven rained on Earth when the Divine Four came down upon it. The capital and the kingdom was one scene of mirth and jollity, and it was a happy day. The high roads were crowded with bright citizens, dancers and dancing masters, the streets echoed to gay songs and sweet musical instruments, and the loud plaudits of bards, genealogists and heralds. The old king, beside himself with joy, gave away untold wealth and kine to Brâhmanas and rich presents to the bards and minstrels.

On the thirteenth day of their birth the holy Vasishtha joyfully gave them names. The son of Kausalyâ he called Râma; Kaikêyi's son answered to Bharata; and the twins from the womb of Sumitra, he named the elder Lakshmana, and the younger Satrughna. On that occasion the king caused numerous Brâhmanas to be fed, both in his capital and in his kingdom and gave away costly gems and rich gifts.

In due time, the boys passed through the sacraments laid down for the twice-born, Annaprâsana, Choula and Upanayana.

Of them, Râma the eldest, who towered above the rest, was a perennial source of delight to his sire and even as the Lotus-born One, the darling of all beings. Very soon they mastered the Vêdas and the Vedângas; brave and wise, endowed with every virtue, they were ever intent upon doing good to others. Among them, Râma was the brightest and shone radiant. Of unfailing powers, a source of delight unto the world, even as the charming Queen of Night, the most expert in training horses and elephants and in chariot races, master of the Science of the Bow, he was withal ever assiduous in attending upon his parents and ministering to their least comforts.

Lakshmana, blessed with every perfection and excellence, was ever devoted to his brother Râma, the beloved of men, the whole current of his thoughts, words and deeds set towards Râma, and *that* even from his very infancy. Sleep visited not the eyes of Râma, the best of men, if Lakshmana were not by, he relished not his food, be it ever so delicious, if Lakshmana was not there to share it with him. His right hand and his visible life currents he regarded Lakshmana. When Râma rode out to hunt, Lakshmana ever accompanied him, bow in hand, to shield him from any harm. Satrughna was unto Bharata what Lakshmana was unto Râma.

Dasaratha, surrounded by his four beloved and fortunate sons, shone even as the Four-faced Brahma among the Regents of the Spheres. His heart waxed glad to see them grow in wisdom, derived from the study of the arts and sciences; to see them adorned with every perfection, to mark their keen sense of shame, when, from heedlessness, their thoughts happened to go astray, to see them proficient in every worldly affair; to hear of their growing fame among men as prodigies of intellect; and to observe their wonderful faculty of seeing before them into the future and act accordingly. The sons were not slow to note the love of their sire towards them; they became more assiduous, if possible, in their studies of the science

of Ethics and sacred legendary lore and in the mastery of the bow, and ever served their sire joyfully.

Now, Ḍaṣaraṭha one day took deep counsel with his High Priest and his kinsmen about the approaching marriage of his boys, when, unto him among his ministers, came all unexpected the great sage Viṣvâmiṭra, of high spiritual lustre and said to the Wardens of the Gate, "Let the king know that Viṣvamiṭra, the son Gâḍhi is here to see him." In great fear and trepidation they ran in and informed the king that Viṣvâmiṭra waited for an audience, whereat, the king made haste to welcome the sage very carefully and humbly, even as Inḍra welcomes Brahma. His face shone with gladness at the sight of Viṣvâmiṭra of stern austerities, and through Vasishtha he extended unto him all the rites of hospitality. Viṣvamiṭra graciously accepted the king's kindness and inquired after his welfare. "Art thou ever intent on gathering rare and valuable objects and increasing the collection? Are thy kin and friends happy and the subjects in thy capital and kingdom? Is thy treasury growing? Are thy subject princes obedient and loyal to thee? Art thou regular in thy sacrifice to the gods and other religious observances? Dost thou duly acquit thyself of thy duties as a man and as a king? Do thy guests receive hospitable entertainment at thy hands? Dost thou make right use of the various methods of kingcraft?" He then proceeded to enquire after the health and welfare of Vasishtha, Vâmaḍêva and the other sages. Pleased with his attentions to them, they proceeded to the audience chamber and took their usual seats.

Then Ḍaṣaraṭha, the great giver, approached the sage and with his hair standing on end through joy, exclaimed, "Holy One! this kind visit of thine, which I never dared to dream of, gladdens my old heart more than if a mortal came by the Waters of Immortality; more than welcome rains to parched deserts; more than a son born to one in his old age, of his lawful wife; more than

recovered treasure to the loser; more than the marriages of their children to fond parents. Has thy journey hither been a pleasant one? What shall I do to gratify thy wishes? Blessed am I, in that Heaven has sent me one than whom I can desire no fitter recipient. Fair is the day that brought thee here. It is now that my birth has borne fruit and this my long life here. As a royal sage, there was no wish of thine that thou didst not gratify; then, by dreadful austerities, thou becamest a Brahmarshi and thy heart knows no desire. Every way thou art an object of reverence and honor unto me. Thy visit here has washed away my sins and it is a wonder to me indeed, when I come to think of it. A sight of thy holy face has translated me to the regions of the Blessed. Allow me to perform thy behests and deserve thy grace. Art thou not a god unto me, a household deity? Thou hast come unto me only for my greatest good and thy visit has increased my religious merit. Hesitate not to acquaint me with the object of thy journey hither, *be it small or great I give you my royal word to accomplish it unto the least detail.*"

So in all humility and from a full heart, spoke Dasaratha, born of ancestors who reckoned among them such famous men as Trisanku. The words fell sweet upon the ears of the noble sage and his heart was glad thereat.

CHAPTER XIX

VIṢVÂMIṬRA SEEKS RÂMA OF ḌAṢARAṬHA

To which, the saintly One, his heart dancing at the words of the great-souled king, replied, "Best of monarchs that thou art it becomes thee well, and no other in this world. It does great credit to the high ancestry to which thou belongest and to the holy sage Vasishtha, who is thy Guru. Promise to carry out what I have in mind, and when thou hast once promised, see you fail not at any cost to accomplish it to the utmost. At present, I am engaged in a holy rite with a special purpose, and two Râkshasas, able to assume any shape at will, are bent upon spoiling it. When I am about to close my rite, these two, Mârîchâ and Subâhu, powerful and skilful, pour down showers of flesh and blood on the sacrificial altar and pollute it for ever. Thus annoyed and my purpose baffled, I came away weary and almost despairing. I cannot bring myself to direct my anger against them, and inflict a curse, for, the nature of the vow forbids it, so, I request thee to give me thy eldest son Râma, beautiful, valiant, and of resistless prowess. Protected by me, and by the force his innate energy as well, he is able to destroy these Râkshasas that afflict me. I will see that this enterprise brings him incalculable good and great glory, such as will be held in high esteem in the three worlds. The Râkshasas cannot stand before him even for a moment, and no one but Râma can destroy them. Full of extreme conceit at their valour, these wicked ones are no match for Râma; lo! the shadow of death is creeping upon them. Never allow the great love thou hast for thy sons to interfere with this momentous work. I swear to thee that the Râkshasas cannot escape him. I know the real Râma, the great-souled One of invincible might. Vasishtha, of high spiritual eminence, knows it too, and these

holy sages that pass their time in stern austerities. If thou desirest to secure supreme renown in this world and unbounded righteousness in the next, send Râma along with me. If thy ministers give their consent to it, as also Vasishtha and the other saintly ones, send Râma along with me. I want him for ten days and no longer; for, by that time I will have finished my sacrifice. So, send along with me the handsome Râma, whom I so earnestly pray for To speak the truth, he has no attachment to anything down here See to it that the time for the performance of the sacrifice is not past. Arrange accordingly and allow no grief to take possession of thy heart."

Thus spake Visvâmitra, the great sage, *to whom nothing was impossible.* With a heavy heart Dasaratha listened to the request of the sage, which, though it conferred good on his son and was righteous in its nature, unnerved him completely Pierced to the heart, the strong-minded king was overpowered with grief and tottered upon his throne

CHAPTER XX

DASARATHA'S REPLY

The words of Visvâmitra stunned him quite. For a long while he remained like one demented, then, mastering himself with a mighty effort, in faltering accents he managed to reply. "Râma, the darling of my heart, Râma, with eyes lovely as the fresh-blown lotus leaves, is yet in his early teens. I dare not even dream of his being able to stand in battle against the mighty night-rangers. Countless millions of war-worn veterans call me their lord and master, each a host in himself. My warriors are valiant, covered with fame and versed in the use of every kind of weapon, human and divine. I shall put myself at their head and wipe out these Râkshasas They are more competent to fight these demons, but ask me not Râma. Here am I, ready to march against them, bow in hand, millions of tried soldiers at my back and fight for thee to my last breath. I promise thee I will myself go over there and see that thou accomplish thy vow safe and without any interruption, but, I pray thee, ask not Râma of me. He is yet a child. He has not yet finished his training. He knows not the strength and weakness of himself and of his enemies. He has never been yet in battle and his is not the might derived from the possession of celestial weapons. Knowest thou not that Râma is entirely unfit to fight against these Râkshasas? They never fight straight, but always take refuge in their arts of illusion. Take Râma away from me and thou takest my very life. Nay, if thou art bent upon taking Râma with thee, take me too and my numerous army, well appointed. This, my son, has gladdened my heart after sixty thousand years of disappointed hopes and fruitless grief. How canst thou have the heart to take away Râma from me, the light of my eyes and the prop of my old age? Knowest thou not that, of my four

sons, Râma lies next to my heart? Need I tell thee that he is my first-born and the most steadfast in virtue? So, take not Râma away from me. These, thy Râkshasas, who are they? Whose sons are they? What is their might? Wherein lies their strength? Under whose protection are they? How dost thou want Râma to fight them? Tell me, for I will do it, how to render useless all their illusions, for thou hast me and my countless hosts to do thy bidding. Instruct me how I can withstand these Râkshasas, proud of their valour."

Then replied Visvâmitra, "May be, thou hast heard of a Râkshasa, Râvana by name, descended of the hoary Pulastya. The sage Visravas is his father, he is own brother to Vaisravana, and monarch of all the Râkshasas on earth, immeasurable is his strength and matchless his might, gifted with wonderful boons from Brahma and with countless hosts of Râkshasas at his back, he grinds the three worlds beneath his heels. When he does not himself condescend to spoil the sacrifices, these, his creatures, Mârîcha and Subâhu, take his place and excel him in cruelty and wantonness."

Then said Dasaratha, with a faint heart "Powerless am I to cope with that wicked one. Have pity on my child of tender years, oh, righteous Lord! Unfortunate that I am, thou art my Guru and my God. The Devas, the Dânavas, the Gandharvas, the Yakshas, the Nâgas and the Pannagas, cannot bear to look upon Râvana, terrible in battle, why speak of puny mortals such as we? Râvana absorbs, as it were, the strength and might of those that face him in battle; I dare not even dream of opposing him or his hosts, either alone or with my armies or with my sons. But, on no account will I part with my darling Râma, beautiful as a god and a child in years, in experience, and in warfare. Mârîcha and Subâhu those sons of Sunda and Upasunda, are mighty and extremely skilled in fight. Born to a Yaksha woman, and best and foremost of the Daityas, they

are terrible in battle, even as the God of Death. They are set upon ruining thy sacrifice and never shall I send my son against them to certain destruction as it were. However, if thou so desirest it, I will call my friends around me and fight with any others but the two."

These words of Ḏasaraṯha, the ravings of a sorrow-laden heart, roused to fury the smouldering wrath of the descendant of Kuṣika, and it blazed forth even as the sacrificial fire glows with steady flame, when huge libations of ghee are poured into it

CHAPTER XXI

VASISHTHA ADVISES DASARATHA TO SEND RÂMA

But, he kept back his rising anger as well as he might and replied to the incoherent words of love uttered by the fond father. "Thy word once gone forth, thou now seekest to go back upon it. Verily this is unworthy of thy race, glorified by such men as Raghu and contrary to the traditions of thy ancestors. Well, well, if thou thinkest that thou have acted right in this matter I will even go back as I came. *Worthy descendant of Kâkutstha! reign thou in peace of heart and in happiness, having kept thy plighted faith so well.*"

At these fiery words of the terrible Visvâmitra, winged with wrath, the solid earth shook to the foundations and the very Gods trembled in dismay. Then, Vasishtha, of mighty vows, intelligent and saintly, knowing that the whole universe stood overpowered with fear at the anger of the sage, addressed himself to Dasaratha. "Born as thou art in the line of Ikshwâku and thyself the incarnation of justice and virtue; firm in thy vows and of fortitude unspeakable; endowed with every kind of worldly happiness, thou shouldst not seek now to swerve from the Path of Right trod by thy ancestors of happy memory. Right well hast thou upheld in the world till now the glory of the line of Raghu, as the ideal Monarch, the Great Giver. Shrink not from the duty laid on thee and let not thy heart be drawn away to the Path of Unrighteousness. You have said, 'I will accomplish thy object, and if thou now seekest to prove unfaithful, thou but destroyest the hard-won merit of every righteous act of thy long life; so is it that I advise thee to send Râma along with the sage. Endowed with the might of celestial weapons or without them, the Râkshasas are but straw before his

fiery energy, protected as he is by the strong arm of Visvâmitra, even as the ambrosia of the Gods by the blazing fire. Knowest thou the mystery that shrouds him whom it is given thee to call thy son? He is the Great Law. He is the Supreme One, the head and source of valor, wisdom and spiritual might. Mortal eyes, clouded by ignorance, cannot pierce the veil that hides his glory, nay, not the highest Gods.

"Visvâmitra here is Dharma embodied; he is the foremost of mighty warriors. None can cope with him in knowledge and wisdom; he is the highest example of Tapas and its exponent He knows best the secret of every kind of magical weapon and none but he,—none, in all the worlds above or below, not even the Gods, the Rishis, the Asuras, Râkshasas, the Gandharvas, the Yakshas, the Kinnaras and the Uragas When he sat of old on the throne of his forefathers and held sway over the earth, these, the mighty sons of Bhrisâsva, were given unto him, every one of them. These grandsons of the Prajâpati Daksha are countless, brilliant in their lustre, all-consuming and of unspeakable might. Daksha had two charming daughters, Jayâ and Suprabhâ, who were the mothers of countless weapons, human and divine, of unbearable effulgence. Five hundred did Jayâ bring forth for the destruction of the Asura hosts, inconceivably powerful and changing forms at will, and to Suprabhâ were born another five hundred, in no way behind their brothers. Visvâmitra here knows everything worth knowing about them; nay, such is his might that he can, without any effort, create new ones, if necessary. Believe me when I tell thee that his vision extends clear into the remotest future. Neither in fame nor in virtue nor in holiness has he his equal. Hence I say unto thee, entertain no doubts about sending Râma along with him. To destroy these impious wretches is child's play to the sage; for the glory of your son and for no other reason does he seek thee out even in thy house and pray thee to give him Râma."

The old heart of Dasaratha was filled with joy and his face shone bright at the calm and convincing words of Vasishtha. Gladly he gave his consent to Visvâmitra taking along with him, Râma, the son of his heart ; and it was to the undying glory of himself and to the welfare of the worlds.

CHAPTER XXII

RÂMA AND LAKSHMAṆA GO WITH VIṢVÂMIṬRA

Then he called unto him Râma and Lakshmaṇa, his inseparable companion, and with his face beaming with joy, caused protective rites to be performed on behalf of the brothers, consecrated with holy manṭras. Vasishtha, the High-priest, himself conducted them; and Kausalyâ with a mother's love, recited powerful and holy mantras over her child's head to guard him from every danger. Thereafter, the king clasped his favourite to his breast, smelt his head, gave him his choicest blessings and with a full heart and cheerful, he made him over unto Viṣvâmiṭra, for, Vasishtha opened his eyes to the real nature of Râma and his grand mission. When the Holy One took leave of the king and started to go, and Râma of God-like presence along with him, a cool and refreshing breeze blew, free of dust. Flowers rained from the heavens, celestial drums, conches and other martial music were heard on high, and the gods rejoiced, in that the hour of their deliverance drew nigh.

Viṣvâmiṭra led the way. Râma followed behind, with bow on his back, his fair curls blown about his face by the gentle breeze; and Lakshmaṇa came last, the shadow of Râma. Even as three-hooded serpents or as the Aṣvins reverently following in the wake of the great Grand-sire, did the brothers of matchless prowess follow the holy Viṣvâmiṭra, the beautiful peacock feathers waving over their thick coils of hair. It added, as it were, to the unbearable splendour of the sage to see the brothers Râma and Lakshmaṇa walk after him brightening the bright space around. Lovely of form and radiant in their lustre, they were a charming sight to see, these boys armed with sword and bow, with leathern gauntlets

braced on their hands; and it forcibly reminded one of the Fire-born sons Skanḍa and Viṣâkha, walking behind Mahâḍêva, the Lord of the worlds.

They had passed not more than a mile along the southern banks of Sarayû, when Viṣvâmiṭra turned back and said in sweet accents, "Lose no time, Râma, but purify yourself with water and receive from me the manṭras Balâ and Aṭibalâ. Hunger nor thirst, nor fatigue nor fever, nor weakness of limbs shall come upon you. The night-rangers shall not come near you, awake or asleep, careless or on your guard. None shall stand before you in the worlds above or below. In strength of arm or in valor, in fortune or in skill, in wisdom or in knowledge, in readiness of speech or quickness of reply you will not find your equal. In every respect you will be far and above any one, man or God; for, these two manṭras secure to the possessor every kind of knowledge and are the source of all wisdom. Recite these on your way and you will want for nothing. Unequalled fame too shall be yours, for, these sciences are the sons of Brahma, of unspeakable glory; and search as I may, I cannot find any one more fitted to receive them than yourself. For, know I not that you are the head and fount of all knowledge, human and divine? These, the offspring of mighty ṭapas, and multiformed, shall confer upon you incalculable good."

So spoke Viṣvâmiṭra; for, who knew better than he that the boys were never before accustomed to travel on foot in the pathless woods, and put up with the chances of hunger and thirst, heat and cold, fatigue and sleeplessness?

Râma purified himself accordingly and with a glad heart and bright face received them at the hands of the Holy One. Thereat his energy and splendor were immeasurably enhanced, even as that of the thousand-rayed Lord of the Day in a cloudless autumn sky. The princes

rendered reverence meet to the Holy sage, their Teacher and the three spent the night on the banks of the Sarayû. And the dark hours passed away all too soon, beguiled by the pleasant discourse of the saintly ascetic, as the boy princes lay on their grass beds, all unaccustomed and strange after the princely luxury of the Royal Palace of their father.

CHAPTER XXIII

KÂMÂSRAMA

At daybreak, Visvâmitra came to rouse the princes lying asleep on their couch of grass.

The golden halo of radiance that crowned the face of Râma caught his eye strongly and half to himself, he said, "What is there that I will not give to know how the thrice-fortunate Kausalyâ managed to find favour in the eyes of the Lord of Glory and won the envied privilege of calling the Great Father, her dear son." Then, aloud to the object of his thoughts "Râma, thou priceless gem that lay enshrined in the holy waters of Kausalyâ's happy womb! the rosy dawn begins to creep over the slumbering Earth. Yonder Sun chases before him the fleeting Spirit of Darkness; awaken thou to *thy* glorious task and put to rout the impious Sons of Darkness.

"The shades of night roll back from the face of the globe; and with it the veil of ignorance that erstwhile hid from my eyes the mystery that circles round thee. To me it was given to set my eyes on thy sleeping glory, yet I long to see thee awakening to the light of day. Discharge thou the rites and observances that thou hast laid down for the children of the Earth : for thou art their ideal and example. Awake, for a stern taskmaster must he be to himself, who seeks to lead others along the rough ways of duty."

Thereat the royal pair sprang from their rude couch, had their bath in the holy river and went through their daily round of duties, nor forget to recite the rare mantras taught them. Then, they reverently saluted their master, the holiest of sages and, with a glad heart, prepared to follow him.

They travelled a long way and saw before them the holy Gangâ of celestial origin, and further on, where it

mixes its waters with the Sarayû; and in that holy spot they came upon the dwellings of saintly ascetics of stern austerities, who pursued their life of self-denial and altruism for thousands of years. The princes were possessed with curiosity to hear from Visvâmitra every thing about it and turned to him with "Holy Sir! to whom does this hermitage belong? Who abides in it at present? Great is our desire to know this, and we see no one who could speak upon it with better knowledge."

Lightly laughed the sage at the seeming ignorance of Râma and at his assumed curiosity. "With great pleasure," said he, "if you will give me your attention for a while."

"In the far past, Mahâdêva chose this spot to carry on a course of austerities, he had taken Pârvati to wife and was once on his way to get her down to attend upon himself during the while. At that time the Lord of Love took human shape and the Wise Ones called him Kâma. In an evil hour he took it into his head to approach the Great God and draw him away from his holy meditations, by rousing in him thoughts of love towards the Daughter of the Mountain-king; and the Maruts secretly urged him on. When, lo! the Lord of Ascetics opened upon him his Third Eye; 'Hum,' cried the Great One and there shot out from his eye a tongue of flame that reduced to a heap of ashes what was once Kâma, the ideal of beauty and grace in the worlds above or below. Thus did the wrath of Siva render the God of Love bodiless; and hence his name thereafter, Ananga, the Bodiless. The spot where he met his sad fate is known as the Angadêsa.

"This is the holy hermitage of Siva and these sages are his disciples, ever devoted to virtue; they know not sin. Rest we here for the night, between these holy rivers which we shall cross to-morrow. Now let us finish the evening rites and proceed to their holy abode."

Meanwhile, those saints of pure lives, saw through their spiritual eye the coming of the holy sage and

his princely disciples and the object of their journey, and came forward to welcome them to their forest home even while the latter were speaking about them. They offered glad rites of hospitality unto Visvâmitra, and extended a hearty welcome to Râma and Lakshmana. And in their sweet company, the quick hours glided away unperceived, so kind were they and loving and so sweet was their discourse; till the shades of night grew on them, which perceiving, they proceeded with concentrated minds to offer their evening prayers to the Goddess of Twilight. So, in that hermitage associated with the evil-fated Kâma, did these pass the night in the company of many other ascetics whom their hosts invited there to share their pleasant time; while Visvâmitra, of boundless wisdom and steadfast virtue, entertained the princes with pleasant narratives of old times and men and beguiled the long hours of the night.

CHAPTER XXIV

TÂTAKÂ'S LAIR

The world awoke to a new day and the valiant princes, rising with the dawn, discharged their morning duties and followed their preceptor to the banks of the mighty river. Meanwhile, their saintly hosts had prepared a beautiful boat to take them across; and reverentially addressing themselves to Visvâmitra, said to him, "May it please you to get into this along with your worthy disciples. We have delayed you enough, now a happy journey to you all the way and every good go with you." Visvâmitra saluted them and took reluctant leave of the kind-hearted ones and crossed over the sacred stream, he and his pupils. When they were in the middle of the current, Râma and his brother heard a mighty sound proceeding from the confluence of swift-coursing waters and turning to their teacher, requested to know the source of the noise as of clashing ocean-waves. To which, Visvâmitra replied *all willingly :*

"*On the heights of the far-famed Kailâsa there exists a lake of supreme sanctity, brought into existence by an act of will of the four-faced One*, and hence its name Mânasa Lake. A stream issuing from that holy spot, comes down the heights and falls into the Gangâ, passing by the capital of your father, even Ayôdhyâ, and hence its name Sarayû. The sound, so wonderful to your young ears, proceeds from the meeting of its holy waters with the rapid current of the divine Gangâ, and you will do well to offer your reverent salutations unto it."

The princes obeyed him accordingly, and crossing over to the farther banks without more loss of time, soon they came upon a frightful forest, devoid of the presence of Brâhmanas; at the sight of which, Râma, curious to

know everything about it, addressed himself to Visvâmitra and said, "Lord! this wood fills me with curiosity; it resounds with the hoarse cries of terrible beasts of prey, rendered all the more fearful by the screams of wild birds and numerous flying insects. Lions, tigers, boars, and elephants, not to speak of numerous winged creatures, lend the aid of their dreadful presence to heighten the horror of the scene. Yet, this forest, so dreadful and uninviting, is pleasant to look at, beautified as it is with countless trees of graceful foliage and lovely blossoms, Dhava, Asvakarna, Kakubha, Bilva, Tinduka, Pâtala and Badarî and many others of unknown origin and properties."

And Visvâmitra hastened to reply, "Râma dear, listen to me while I narrate to you a story of the far past as to whom this frightful forest belongs. Long years ago, these tracts known as Malada and Karûsa were large kingdoms teeming with countless millions, prosperous, happy and fair, even as the fancy creations of the gods. Once upon a time, it befell that Indra slew the Asura Vritra; the sin took shape and entered into him along with hunger and uncleanliness, overpowering his divine form and nature. Then the gods and the sages had him purified with the waters of *holy rivers, consecrated with powerful Mantras; and here it was that his foul uncleanliness fell* away from him. Having consigned to this place the uncleanliness and the hunger that afflicted him, the hearts of the gods were glad. And Indra, overjoyed at finding himself free from his troubles, and pure once more, in a transport of gratitude, did he confer a boon on this place. "These two populous provinces have helped to receive the foulness of my body; and they shall be celebrated on earth, as Malada and Karûsa." The Devas applauded his act and his sense of reverence to the place that gave him back his pristine purity. And for long years thereafter, these places were the homes of happy millions, living in plenty, and blessed with everything that man could get from Nature.

Then there came on earth a Yaksha woman, who had the strength of a thousand elephants and could take any form at will. She was the wife of Suṇḍa; and Ṭâṭaka (for so was she named) bore him a son, Mârîcha, who equalled Inḍra himself in prowess. Huge of bulk and strong of arm, that Râkshasa held the people of these kingdoms in abject terror, by his matchless might and frightful countenance and form; while Tâṭakâ amused herself with destroying the innocent inhabitants hereabouts, by hundreds and by thousands. Yonder has she taken up her abode, about half a yojana from here; and hence people steer clear of these parts as the own preserves of Ṭâṭakâ. Slay her of your strong arm and rid these fair lands of a great pest; for I command you thereunto. I tell you again, that none dare to enter these regions, through which the dreadful Yakshiṇi ranges free and unhindered. And now you know, as well as I, how these once fair and populous lands have been laid waste, beyond all hope of recovery."

CHAPTER XXV

ṮÂTAKÂ

To which pregnant words of the sage of no mean might, Râma, the flower of valor, returned sweet answer, "I have been given to understand that the Yakshas are not very formidable, how is it that one of them, and that a woman, is gifted with the wonderful strength of a thousand elephants?"

"Know then" said Visvâmiṯra "that this weak and fragile woman is endowed with abnormal strength by virtue of a boon. Long ago there was a Yaksha, Sukêṯu by name, a man of righteous deeds and great prowess. Unblest with any child, he had recourse to Brahma to get one; long did he pray and earnestly, until the Great Architect of the worlds was pleased with his ṯapas, and gave him a lovely daughter Ṯâtakâ, with the strength of a thousand elephants in her, but no son. And when she came of age to marry, he gave her a dream of beauty and grace as wife to Sunḏa the son of Jarjha. In good time, Mârîcha was born unto them, who later on was shorn of his great glory by being cursed to become a Râkshasa. When Sunḏa met his fate at the hands of Agasṯya, she and her son sprang upon the Holy One with terrible roars, meaning to eat him up; whereat of the mighty sage blazed forth wrath in and he cursed the pair "Wretches! Quit these fair forms and take up those of Râkshasas, terrible to behold and monstrous, and roam the earth feeding on human flesh."

Maddened with the curse, she takes revenge by laying waste, in her fury, what were once the favorite haunts of Agasṯya. And, Râma! I would that in the interests of the cows and the Brâhmaṉas, you slay out of hand, this wicked Yakshiṉi of cruel deeds, this fiend, who uses her

terrible strength to such evil purpose. And the more so, because, except your valiant self, no one in the worlds above or below can bring down this wretch, who glories in the might of her boon. Let no misplaced sense of pity stay your arm from wreaking this long delayed vengeance upon this cruel monster. For, you are of the line of kings and the welfare of defenceless millions demands it at your hands. A king ought to discharge his duties cruel or otherwise, sinful or meritorious, if he would protect those whose destinies lie in his hands. This is the Path of Right trod by the kings of old, whose broad backs bore the heavy responsibility of empire. Slay this unrighteous one, for, no law, human or divine, restrains her actions. Know you not that Indra slew Mántharâ, the daughter of Virôchana, who sought to plunge the whole world in ruin? Know you not that Vishnu mercilessly destroyed the wife of Bhrigu and mother of Sukra, who calmly set about to wipe out Indra. Instances out of count can I quote to show that kings have always deemed it their duty to rid the earth of such wicked monsters in human form. So, Râma! upon your head and eyes be it that thou cleave the heart of this woman, stealing *your* heart against tender emotions."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE FALL OF ṮÂTAKÂ

Then, to the soul-stirring words of his preceptor, Râma, steadfast in his principles of conduct, gave meet reply, with joined palms the while: "My father's commands and more than that, my respect for thee, impel me to follow without hesitation or doubting the orders given by Vis̱vâmiṯra. For, have I not been enjoined to that purpose by my sire Ḏas̱araṯha, in the royal presence and before the holy sages? And shall I falsify his words? Never. So, out of respect to my father and out of respect to the Holy One of boundless wisdom whom I have the happiness to call my Guru, I shall verily bring about the destruction of Ṯâtaka and no doubt of that. Here I am, ready to carry out your orders, that aim at the welfare of cows and Brâhmaṉas and the happiness of these once prosperous lands."

So saying, he grasped his mighty bow by the middle, strung it in a moment and drew it to his ear; and the sound thereof was terrible to hear, and echoed far and near. Birds and beasts and the numerous creatures that made the dreadful forest their home, trembled in affright. Ṯâtaka was at first confused; but, rage unbounded mastered her and she rushed towards the spot whence the sound came. Seeing her advance towards them with open mouth, huge as a mountain, and deformed, Râma turned to Lakshmaṉa and said, "Lo! my brother! Yonder Yakshiṉi is really no pleasant sight to behold. Timid ones will die of terror were they to look at her. But, endowed as she is with unlimited powers of illusion and be she formidable to stand against, my arrows shall compel her to retire as fast as she came, but a nose and ears less. Anyhow, I cannot bring myself to slay her,

for, her womanhood stays my arm; I shall even content myself with depriving her of her energy and power of motion."

He had not finished, when Ṯâtaka espied him afar and rushed at him with a howl of rage. Viṣvâmiṯra stayed her with the word "Hum" and prayed that the brothers may come out safe and victorious. She raised a huge cloud of dust that shut out the princes from view for a time; and resorting to her powers of illusion, showered rocks and stones on the pair. Then Râma's ire was up; and scattering the rocks by a flight of arrows, he cut off her hands as she sprang at him. Yet she stayed not but roared frightfully, albeit tired and without her hands when, Lakshmaṉa operated upon her and chopped off her ears and nose. The next moment she assumed a thousand shapes and was here, there and everywhere; then, all at once she vanished from view, leaving them bewildered by her illusion. Yet, a ceaseless downpour of rocks indicated her activity and made her terrible presence felt, at which, Viṣvâmiṯra grew impatient and exclaimed to Râma with some warmth, "A truce to your misplaced tenderness; are you not yet convinced that she is a she-devil who has destroyed the sacrifices of many an unoffending sage? Twilight is drawing apace and then these foul things of darkness are most powerful, nay almost invincible. See, how her energy increases as the day wane and the night draws near. Slay her outright and delay not."

Strong in her powers of illusion, she remained invisible; but Râma's shafts sought her out even there and stayed her rocky downpour. Then, in sheer despair, did she rush at the princes with terrible roars of baffled rage; when, the boy-hero shot at her a Fiery Shaft. Fierce as a thunderbolt and almost irresistible, it struck her full on the chest; down she fell and gave up her bloody life.

At once there arose a glad shout of unspeakable relief from the anxiously watching Inḏra and his host of celes-

tials. "Bravo! bravo!, well done!" cried they with one voice and lauded Râma to the skies. They then addressed themselves to Visvâmitra and said, "Holy One! all hail to you; you have laid every one of us, under a deep obligation. Give yet another proof of your great love to Râma by imparting unto him the Science of the divine weapons, the sons of the Prajâpati, Bhrisâsva. Of never-failing might, brought into existence by long and terrible Tapas, you cannot find for them a fitter recipient than Râma, so devoted is he to your service, and so necessary it is towards accomplishing a great end we have in view. So delay no more." They ended; and with loving salutations to the Holy One and hearty blessings on the boy-heroes, departed to their respective abodes.

Meanwhile, the shades of night were falling fast, and Visvâmitra, well pleased with Râma, smelt him lovingly on the head and said, "Rest we here for the night and reach my hermitage to-morrow." So they passed the night in the once-dreaded haunts of Tâtakâ, but now freed from its unhappy curse and once again a smiling and happy land, beautiful even as Chaitraratha. Râma, having thus rid the earth of the terrible daughter of a Yaksha, gods and sages vied with one another in singing his praises; a deep sleep and sweet descended upon the tired eyes of Râma and he lay locked in the soft arms of slumber, till he was roused at early dawn by the holy sage.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE GIFT OF VISVÂMITRA

Next morning, Visvâmitra, of mighty renown, turned to the young hero with a pleasant smile and addressed him in accents sweet and mild, "Well pleased am I with you; and out of the joy that fills my heart, shall I impart unto you the mysteries connected with warlike weapons of every kind; master of which, neither Gods nor Asuras, Gandharvas nor Uragas, can stand against you in battle and not come under your influence and be worsted. Such mighty weapons shall I give you, divine in their essence.

1. Dandachakra
2. Dharmachakra
3. Kâlachakra
4. Vishnuchakra
5. Aindrâstra
6. Vajrâstra
7. Sivâ's Trident
8. Brahmasiras
9. Aishîkâstra
10. Brahmâstra
11. The clubs, Môdakî and Sikharî
12. Dharmapâsa
13. Kâlapâsa
14. Varunapâsa
15. Varunâstra
16. Two thunderbolts, the moist and the dry.
17. Pinâkâstra
18. Nârâyanâstra
19. Agnêyâstra (named Sikhara)

30. Nandana, the favorite Astra of the Vidyâdharas (sword-like in shape)
31. Mânava
32. Prasvâpana
33. Prasamana } (the favorite Astras of the Gandharvas).

34. Sûryâstra
35. Darpana
36. Sôshana
37. Santâpana
38. Vilâpana } favorites of the God of Love
39. Madana
40. Mohanâstra (used by the Pisâchas)
41. Tâmasâstra
42. Saumanâstra
43. Samvarta
44. Mausalâstra
45. Satyâstra

20. Vâyavyâstra (named Prathana)
21. Hayasiras
22. Kraunchâstra
23. Vishnusakti
24. Rudrasakti
25. Kankâla
26. Musala
27. Ghôra
28. Kâpâla
29. Kankana

(25–29 used by the Asuras)

46. Mâyâdhara
47. Têjas Prabhâ
48. Sisirâstra (used by the God Sôma)
49. Sudâmana
50. Sitêshu (the weapon of Bhaga)
51. Mânavâstra

All these and many more do thou receive from me. They are of no ordinary might; they can take any form at will and can be depended upon in any emergency."

Then Visvâmitra duly purified himself and taking his seat facing the East, initiated Râma into the mysteries of those magical weapons; and well pleased was he thereat. So mighty were they that the very Gods could not receive and retain them in their entirety.

As the sage uttered the words of power, they assumed visible form and stood about Râma. With joined palms they addressed their new master and said, "Here we are, Lord Râma, thy servants to command. Ever gracious unto thee, we stand ready to anticipate thy least wishes."

Râma accepted their service and touching each one of them in token of mastership, replied to them with a pleased heart, "Come unto me when I think of you." He next turned to his Guru and offered him reverent salutations; after which they resumed their journey.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MYSTERY OF THE WITHDRAWAL

They walked for a while in silence, when Râma turned to Visvâmitra and said with a bow, "You have been pleased to initiate me into the mysteries of these magical weapons and have rendered me almost invulnerable to Gods and Asuras. But, may I request to know how these are withdrawn?"

And all too glad, did the sage of mighty vows and terrible energy instruct him therein.

"1. Satyavân
2. Satyakîrti
3. Dhrishtha
4. Rabhasa
5. Pratîhâratara
6. Parângmukha
7. Avângmukha
8. Lakshâksha
9. Vishama
10. Dridhanâbha
11. Sunâbhaka
12. Dasâksha
13. Satavaktra
14. Dasasîrsha
15. Satodara
16. Padmanâbha
17. Mahânâbha
18. Dundunâbha
19. Sunâbhaka
20. Jyotisha
21. Krisâna
22. Nairâsya
23. Vimala
24. Yogandhara
25. Haridra (to destroy the Daityas).
26. Sârchirmâlî
27 Dhritirmâlî
28. Vrittimân
29. Ruchira
30. Pitrisaumanasa
31. Vidhûta
32. Makara
33 Karavîrakara
34 Dhana
35. Dhânya
36. Kâmarûpa
37 Kâmaruchi
38. Moha
39. Âvarana
40. Jrimbhaka
41. Sarvanâbha
42. Santâna
43. Varana

Receive from me these sons of Bhrisâswa, capable of taking any shapes at will and of unbearable splendor. For, no better recipient do I see than thee."

"As my Lord willeth" replied Râma with a glad heart and did so. With joined palms they ranged themselves around Râma in human shapes of exceeding effulgence, and there was nothing that he could not command whom they owned as their master. Some were like glowing coals, some like smoke and others radiant like the sun and the moon. All of them reverently saluted their new master and said, "Here are we, thou flower of valor! awaiting thy orders." "Dwell ye in my memory" replied Râma, "and assist me when the time comes. I give you leave to go." "We obey" replied they and taking respectful leave of him, vanished from view. With the permission of his Guru, he instructed Lakshmaṉa in the mysteries of the magical weapons and their withdrawal.

They then resumed their journey until they came to a beautiful grove of trees, at the sight of which, Râma turned to his master and said in charming accents, "What may be that tall grove yonder, hard by that mountain before us? It looks more like a bank of clouds piled up, so lofty it is and so dark. A pleasant sight to see the happy birds and beasts sporting there fearlessly with joyful cries. The lovely aspect of the country hereabouts impels me to think that we are well out of the dark and dreary forest of the she-demon, Ṯâtakâ. Who is it that resides in that charming locality? Verily, great is my desire to know everything about it. Are we come to where range those wicked wretches of fierce deeds, who revel in slaying Brâhmaṉas and destroying the sacrifices of innocent sages? Where do you conduct your sacrifice? Where should I take my stand to destroy the Râkshasas and protect your rite? Prithee satisfy my unbounded curiosity on this head—you from whom time and space have no secrets!"

CHAPTER XXIX

VÂMANA AND BALI

And to him who desired to acquaint himself with the story of that grove, as if he were no wiser than any one of us, replied Visvâmitra of boundless spiritual might, "Here it was that Vishnu, the Lord of the Universe abode invisible for ages untold, engaged in long and difficult Tapas, for the good of the worlds; and as Vâmana, He sanctified it with His Divine Presence. Siddhâsrama is it called, for, even here the Blessed One accomplished the object of His Tapas.

"It was about that time, Bali, the son of Virôchana, routed the celestial hosts and held undisputed sway over the three worlds. He commenced a grand sacrificial rite, when, Agni and the other Gods came to Vishnu here and said, "Bali, the son of Virôchana, is even now performing a grand sacrifice; and before it is over, you should see that we accomplished our object. He makes it a point to refuse nothing to any one who may ask him for it, it matters not who or what. For our sake call in thy inscrutable Power of Illusion to thy aid; assume the form of a dwarf, seek the sovereignty of the three worlds at his hands as a gift, and bring peace and happiness to the tortured hearts of us all."

It chanced that about the same time, Kâsyapa, the Patriarch, and his wife Aditi carried on a long and severe course of austerities and won the grace of the Lord. Even as the noon-day sun or like the blazing fire shone he in his spiritual glory. Vishnu came down to where he was and spoke to him in sweet and kindly accents, "Son, mightily pleased am I with your Tapas. Ask of me what thou wilt and it is yours."

With noble hymns did Kâsyapa praise the Giver of all good, "Supreme One! My long and difficult vow has

indeed borne fruit in that I have been blessed with a sight of Thy Blessed Presence. Thou art Tapas in Thy essence; Thou art the embodiment of Tapas; Thou art the sum total of all Tapas; and Thou art the innermost soul of every kind of Tapas. The whole universe do I see in Thy resplendent form. Thou hast no beginning and Thy nature is beyond the ken of any, man or god. Lord! I take my refuge in Thee and Thy boundless mercy."

And to him replied the Lord, "Again do I say unto you that you have won my grace. You are pure as Purity itself and I can refuse you nothing."

Then the son of Marîchi submitted unto him a prayer in all humility, "Great One! grant Thou this boon unto Aditi and unto the gods who pray it of Thee. Deign Thou to be born as our son and let the world know Thee as the younger brother of Indra, whom Thou hast placed over the gods. Render Thou a signal service thereby to the distressed Dêvas. And this holy spot shall, through Thy grace, deserve the name of Siddhâsrama, for, Thou goest forth from this spot when Thy object has been accomplished.'

"Be it so," rejoined the Lord and was born of Aditi as Vâmana. Intent upon the good of the worlds, did He approach Bali as a dwarf and say, "Great Giver! grant me this prayer of mine, *three short feet of earth*," and He got it. Thrice did He put forth His mighty foot and the three worlds were covered with it. Bali was shorn of his overwhelming pride and might and Vâmana gave back the sovereignty of the worlds to Indra

This hermitage is ever associated with the presence of the Lord and ever my heart turns to it with unbounded devotion to Him. Here do the Râkshasas resort, the untiring enemies of the peaceful sages and their sacrifices; and here it is you should lay them low, the evil ones. This day shall we reach it, the holy Siddhâsrama and it is yours as much as it is mine."

Very soon they were within its sacred precincts and then it was that Visvâmitra shone in all his glory, even as the cloudless moon resplendent in the constellation of Purnarvasu. There he was welcomed by the numerous ascetics of saintly life that made Siddhâsrama their home; right reverently did they accord unto him due worship and no less hearty was the welcome they extended to the princely pair. The brothers rested themselves for a while and approaching their master, said, "Lord! if thou so wilt, thou mayest take upon thyself the sacrificial vow even to-day. Rightly has this place been named Siddhâsrama, for, thy object shall, of a truth, be realized here." "May your words prove true," replied Visvâmitra, and with restrained senses and concentrated mind, did he take upon himself the initiatory vows. In that peaceful hermitage the princes passed the night in the sweet company of the holy sages. At the dawn of day they were up and offering their prayers to the Goddess of Twilight. Their religious observances for the morning over and the mystical recitations of the Mantras, they touched the feet of their Teacher, who, having finished the offerings unto the Fire-god, was seated in calm repose.

CHAPTER XXX

VISVÂMITRA'S SACRIFICE

The valiant princes were no mean judges of time and place: they knew when to speak and where; and in words respectful and apt, did they address Visvâmitra: "Lord! kindly acquaint us with the precise time when we should be on our guard against the wicked Râkshasas; for, we do not wish to be taken unawares and be late."

The assembled sages there were loud in their praises of the heroic brothers and the martial ardour that characterised their words and actions. "Six days and nights from this, do ye keep strict watch against the cruel ones. The Holy One has taken the sacrificial vow and will observe silence." And for six days and nights did the youths of boundless energy keep watch and ward over the hermitage. They put their heroic souls into the arduous task and were wholly absorbed in it; and Visvâmitra, safe under their protection, went on with his sacrificial rite uninterrupted.

On the sixth day, Râma turned to his brother and said "Lakshmana, be on the alert and keep a sharp look out." And even as he spake and prepared himself for action, did the sacrificial altar begin to glow all on a sudden. Lovely flowers were scattered over it and the utensils of sacrifice—spoons, ladles, pots, pans, fuel-sticks and the sacred grass. Visvâmitra was conducting the rite, grave and silent, while the Adhvaryus and the priests assisted him therein. And to the deep intonation of the holy Mantras to drive away the black demons, did the sacrifice proceed according to the rules laid down for it. All at once the fire leaped up; and close upon it was heard a frightful roar proceeding from the sky. The dreadful Râkshasas were upon them, shrouded

clouds that darkened the earth, even as during the heavy rains—the effects of their powers of illusion. Mârîcha and Subâhu and their followers ranged themselves in the sky and kept up a continual shower of blood on the fire-altar. The fire blazed up again, higher than before, as if in angry protest against this foul desecration ; and answering fires flashed forth from the eyes of Râma as if reflecting the blood-stained altar. He rushed to the spot and looking upwards, saw the foul demons ranged aloft in terrible array, darkening the darkened sky. All at once did the two foremost, Mârîcha and Subâhu, swoop down upon him, even as unclean birds of prey ; when, Râma turned to his brother and said "Lakshmana, lo! there they come, the wicked wretches, the destroyers of numberless holy rites. Unsightly cannibals these, the dread foes of the celestials, yet tough and unassailable even as thunderbolts. I cannot somehow bring myself to slay such like chaff, small game for me ; yet shall I drive them away, even as fleet-footed clouds before a gale."

With that, he sent forth a Mânavâsṯra, flaming and terrible in its energy and it that struck Mârîcha full on the chest. Back he flew with resistless speed, hundred yôjanas and more, until he fell senseless and tottering into the depths of the tossing ocean.

Amused at the sight, Râma turned to Lakshmaṉa "Wonderful indeed is the Cold Arrow, the mighty Mânavâstra and just in its punishment. See, it has struck him senseless, but keeps yet the spark of life in him, as if it divined my secret resolve to spare him against a future occasion, when I have use for him. And as for these, his friends and followers, I shall even destroy the wretched crew, merciless, of foul lives, delighting in deep draughts of human blood, the foes to every holy rite and sacrifice."

So saying, and as if to display his quickness of hand, he let fly an Agnêyâsṯra at Subâhu, which struck him square on his heart and hurled him down, a shapeless corpse. And ere the eye had time to wink, he let fly a

Vâyavyastra that despatched the rest to "where the wicked cease from troubling," to the immense delight of the sages, who were anxiously watching this strange fight, between a delicate slip of a boy and the fierce-visaged Râkshasas of vast bulk and might. They could scarcely bring themselves to believe what they saw—it was over so soon ; but, when they realized the wonderful truth, they broke forth in unstinted applause and hearty blessings and eyed Râma with strange awe and reverence, even as the Gods regarded Indra when he came back victor from his terrible battle with the Asuras.

The sacrifice neared its happy end ; the earth and the sky were clear and happy once again, when Visvâmitra turned to Râma and said, " Now my heart knows peace, in that my object has been accomplished. Well hast thou discharged the bidding that thy Guru laid on thee. And rightly has this hermitage been named Siddhâsrama ; you have but confirmed the fact and conferred greater glory on it."

Thanking thus the boy-hero in words sweet and noble, the sage proceeded to his evening prayers, accompanied by the gratified princes.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE TRIP TO METHELÂ

There they stayed for the night, the heroic youths and it was a happy night to them; in that they had succeeded in their mission. Next morning they were up at day-break and having finished their daily observances, went over to where Visvâmitra and the other ascetics sat. Reverently they saluted their Guru, who blazed forth in his splendour even as the smokeless flame and said to him in sweet accents and noble "Here we are, thy servants to command; what are our orders for the day? Nay, far be it from your noble heart the thought that you are working us too much, royal youths delicately nurtured and daintily brought up. There was a king whom gaunt Famine drove to sell his only son to a low-born hind; would the boor work the boy less for being a prince? We are yours, body and soul, for, our sire has made us over to you, and here is our place at your feet, until you have no more use for us." *Even so does the Lord seek out His children and render them sweet service and lowly.*

Visvâmitra replied for the other sages and said, "Janaka, the righteous ruler of Mithilâ, is even now celebrating a grand sacrifice; and if it is not inconveniencing you greatly, we very much like you to come with us. Besides, there is for you a sight to see—a gem of a bow, wonderful, of inconceivable strength, blazing in its energy. It was given by the Gods to a former ruler of the land during a great sacrifice. Neither the Gods nor the Gandharvas, nor the Asuras nor the Râkshasas, can so much as string it; why speak of puny mortals? Nay, not that there were wanting countless princes of mighty arm who essayed that impossible feat desiring to gauge the power of the weapon. So, there are two things to attract you

thither—the holy sacrifice and the wonderful bow. It was, as I told you, got by a king of old, as the reward of a great sacrifice he performed in honor of the Gods; who, pleased therewith, gave him the excellent weapon. It forms the chief object of adoration in Janaka's palace and he offers reverent worship to it every day with bright flowers and sweet perfumes and incense."

He ended and prepared to set out along with the expectant princes and the holy ascetics. Taking affectionate leave of the Wood-Gods that had sheltered him so long in their midst he said, "May all good be yours. Long have I sojourned under your kind shades and to-day I take reluctant leave of you, the object of my stay among you joyfully accomplished. I go forth hence to the Himâlayan heights, over across the Gangâ." Reverently he went round the hospitable abode and set his face towards the north.

And him followed a hundred conveyances of Brahmavâdins; and wonderful to behold! the birds and the beasts that dwelt about the holy hermitage went after the mighty sage of righteous vows, until he pressed them to return.

They travelled a long distance, until the sun hung low in the heavens, when the company encamped on the banks of Soṉâ. They took their evening bath in the sacred stream and having made offerings unto the Fire-God, sat down before Visvâmitra; the princes approached the group and with low reverence to the elders, took their seats in front of their Guru. Râma it was, that started the conversation by a question to Visvâmitra. "May I pray you to satisfy my great curiosity about this region where we are? Thickly wooded and well-watered, to whom does it belong?" And the sage, who loved nothing more than to converse upon things good and holy, spoke as follows, induced thereto by Râma, while the sages of stern austerities drank in the tale with eager ears.

CHAPTER XXXII

KUSANÂBHA

There was once a righteous king, Kusa by name, one of the mind-born sons of Brahma—the wisest and the most valiant. Unlike Nârada and the Kumâras he chose the Path of Action; and leaving his bright home on high, he took upon himself the onerous duties of a Ruler of men; hence his name Kusa. Ever respectful unto the good, he was ever intent upon the discharge of the duties of his high office and acquired immense spiritual merit by his hard austerities.

He took unto wife a princess of Vidarbha, who was, in every way, a meet wife for such a holy king, and she bore unto him four sons, all like unto their sire in character and might—Kusâmba, Kusanâbha, Adhûrtarajas, and Vasu. The old king was extremely pleased with his worthy sons of truthful speech, righteous lives, bright presence and boundless energy; and following the traditions of the kings of old, he spoke to them, "Reign ye over the earth and acquire inestimable merit thereby."

And, in obedience to their father's commands, did the four princes found four excellent capitals—Kausâmbî, Mahôdaya, Dharmâranya and Girivraja, respectively. These are the dominions of Vasu, the last of the brothers. See you yon hills, five in number, that guard the country like giant sentinels? And there is the lovely stream, Sôna, of great sanctity, that runs like a silver garland among the hills and waters the land of Magadha ruled by Vasu. It is a lovely spot, fertile, well-watered and healthy, the site of ancient kingdoms now no more.

Kusanâbha, the royal sage, had by the Apsaras, Ghritâchî, a hundred graceful daughters. One day, these girls, young and lovely, took it into their heads to enjoy a walk in the royal gardens about the city. They were a

charming sight to see, these young and lovely maidens, in their gems and gemmed robes, even as clear pools of crystal waters in the rains. They had a happy time of it among the arbours and bowers, dancing and singing and leaping and frisking.

And it so chanced that Vâyu, the Lord of Air, beheld them in the gardens, in all their ravishing loveliness, in the pride of their youth and charms. Like bright stars between murky clouds shone they; and Vâyu was stirred even unto the utmost depths of his fickle heart. "My heart goes out unto you, every one, ye lovely ones! Be mine and crown my days with sweet happiness. Cast off aside that mortal nature of yours and enjoy immortal life in my company. A pitiable sight that youth of mortals even as a streak of lightning in a dark sky; a blinding flash and lo! it is gone. But I shall endow you with the deathless youth and beauty of the Immortals themselves."

Long laughed they and loud at these presumptuous words of the Wind-God, whose might none can resist and live. "Thou coursest ever in the bodies of beings, high and low, and no one is unacquainted with what you are and what you can do. Verily it becomes you not to insult us thus with your proposal. Know you not that we are the daughters of Kusanâbha and that it is but child's play to us to hurl yon Indra from his seat of power? But we waste not our energy on trifles. May that time never come about, when, out of a perverted heart, we will presume to insult our parent of truthful speech and ourselves choose our husbands. Our sire is our master and our God; and *they* are our lords whom *he* gives us to."

Enraged at the bold and defiant words of the girls, Vâyu's heart was shaken with wrath; and putting forth his might, did he distort their graceful limbs out of all recognition.

In great grief and shame, they rushed into their father's presence and fell at his feet with sobs and tears. The sight of his dear daughters, once so lovely and happy, but

now so crooked and deformed, and out of their wits with shame and grief, stirred his placid nature to its very depths, and he exclaimed " What is this, my dears! Who has dared to insult the Great Law of Right thus flagrantly? Who has made you crooked and distorted? What! all silent! and weeping!'

In fierce rage he hissed forth his questions, like a hooded snake about to strike; but, mastering himself with a mighty effort, he sent forth his clear spiritual eye before which nothing was hidden.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Brahmadatta

Thereupon the hundred daughters of Kusanabha laid their heads at his feet and spake "Vayu, Pervader of all, would even compel us to his wishes; and forgetful of all sense of right and duty, had he recourse to evil ways. 'We are under our reverend sire' we pleaded 'and are not our own masters. Ask thou our sire, if he would give us to thee as wives.' He would not listen to us; but with a heart bent on evil, made us what you see, even while we were earnestly pleading with him."

Then the King, a rare model of patience and virtue, replied to his afflicted daughters in accents mild and grave. "Well have you done and gloriously. Forgiveness should characterise the life of every one laying any claims to self-restraint and serenity; and you have borne patiently a deadly insult. I cannot enough praise your harmony of spirit and action, in that you have all acted alike and kept before your eyes the traditions of our race, for, forgiveness is the brightest jewel in the crown of a woman; nay, for the matter of that, man as well. Hard task for a girl to brave a man's wiles and seductions harder to have a giant's strength and not use it like a giant, in the face of deadly insult, harder still not to burn one's wings at the baleful fires of celestial beauty, harder still to keep back our thunderbolts when we have the right to launch them against the mighty gods and the chance; and lo! hardest of all, wonder of wonders!! the wayward hearts of a hundred maidens, (whose name is frailty) beating all one stroke and acting in perfect unison. Endowed with Forgiveness, a man need not go seek for any other virtue—Charity, Truth, Sacrifice, Fame, or Righteousness; for, Forgiveness rules the world and holds it up."

Mightier than the very Gods, yet he sent them away, and consulted with his wise ministers as to the marriage of his daughters, the time, the place, and the parties.

It was about that time, a great sage, Chuli by name, practised the Brahma Tapas, with pure life and chaste vows; and all along, a Gandharva, Somada by name, the daughter of Urmila, attended upon him devotedly, with restrained senses and righteous heart. Gratified with her service, the Holy One saw into the record of Time and spoke "Fair Lady! well hast thou served me and won my favour. Is there anything I can do for thee?"

She marked that he was in a mood to give; and in sweet words and apt, did she pray the Blessed One, who was no mean speaker himself. "Lord! I make no difference between thee and the supreme Brahman, so great thy Tapas and so mighty the Brahmic splendour that crowns thee. I would even have a son, endowed with Brahma Tapas No husband do I take, nor does any claim me as his wife Give me a son, in that I approach thee according to the Brahma mode of marriage."

Pleased with her purity of heart and nobility of purpose, Chuli gave her a mind-born son, named Brahmadatta. Kampilya made he his capital and held sway there as splendidly as Indra over his heavenly realm.

And Kusanabha made up his mind to bestow his hundred daughters on Brahmadatta. Respectfully did he invite him to his city and pray him to accept his girls in marriage. And lo! the moment Brahmadatta took them by the hand, their deformity and grief dropped away from them like a dark cloak and they shone, if possible, with greater loveliness and grace than ever; whereat the father's heart knew no bounds to its joy to see them freed from the evil spell cast upon them by Vayu. Later on, he sent them

away with their husband to his capital, with splendour becoming their rank and his sense of joy.

Somada, the fond-mother, rejoiced most at the glorious choice her son did make. She could not fondle her daughters-in-law enough nor praise their noble father.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Visvamitra's Ancestry

His daughters gone away from him, the childless father set about to perform a rite to get a son to continue his line on Earth. When he was busy about it, Kusa, his father and the mind-born son of Brahma, came down unto him and said, "Son! verily you shall be blessed with a boy, a righteous one after your own heart. Gadhi, you shall call him ; and he shall hold up your name to unparalleled renown in the worlds for all time time to come." He spoke and went back to the high world of Brahma, even as he came.

And in good time did Kusanabha see a son born unto him and Gadhi was his name—a marvel of virtue and holiness. Him am I proud to call my sire, Gadhi the saint , I am a Kausika and a decendant of the godlike Kusa. I have a sister too, Satyavati, born before me, who is given in marriage to Richika ; ever devoted to her husband, she followed him to Swarga in her mortal body. But soon she came down on Earth, as the holy stream Kausiki , heavenly in her origin, charming and crystal-like in her purity, my sister has devoted herself to the good of humanity. And out of the great love I bear to my dear one, do I like to abide at her side, on the slopes of the Himalaya, whence she flows. Ever steadfast in truth and righteous, my sister Satyavati,

the paragor of wives, stays in her mountain home ; while I, in pursuance of the vow I have bound myself by, have come down here, even to Siddhasrama, far far from my beloved sister ; and deep is the debt of obligation I am under to your godlike valor, in that you have enabled me to accomplish my desires.

Well, it is now past midnight; and I have been keeping you all from sweet sleep, by my accounts of my own ancestry and of the country where we are now, as you desired to know of me. And now, seek ye the arms of repose ; else will our journey to-morrow be delayed Not a breath of air stirs the leaf of yon trees ; beasts and birds have sought, ere long, their silent abodes ; and Night has spread her black pall over the earth and every part thereof. The shades of twilight are gradually fading away ; and dark Night keeps watch over the sleeping earth and flashes forth bright glances from many a starry eye and constellation And yonder comes the Queen of Night, the silvery Moon, chasing the darkness from off the Earth with her cool and clear rays and infusing joy and gladness into the hearts of all beings. Behold the Rangers of the night, beings that love the shades of darkness, hosts of Yakshas, Rakshasas, and terrible monsters that batten on human flesh."

He ended , the auditors shook of the spell that lay deep upon them and with one voice cried, " Well, hast thou spoken, Holy One" and rendered him thanks meet and unstinted praise. " Noble is the race of the Kausikas and ever intent upon Right and Virtue ; and the kings that adorn that line, mighty souls, even as the Great Father Himself. And not the least, your Holy Self, that has acquired everlasting renown ; nor is your sister Kausiki a whit behind these, the best of streams and the bright gem in the crown royal race of Kusa."

And to the sound of their sweet praise, did Visvamitra sink into the lap of sleep, even as the resplendent Orb of Day retires to rest behind the Evening Hill. The Royal brothers were no less warm in their heart-felt praises of their master and with minds filled with awe and wonder, sought their rude couches and courted calm repose

CHAPTER XXXV.

Ganga and Uma.

Visvamitra and the sages with him rested there for the night on the banks of Sona At day-break, he roused the sleeping princes and said "The day dawns and the morning twilight comes on apace. Quit thy slumbers, dear Rama, and prepare to start"

They went through the morning prayers and were about to set out, when Rama addressed himself to the sage and said "Master, this Sona runs shallow, her clear crystal water dotted with small sandy hillocks Which way shall we cross it?"

To which the sage replied, "Our friends even now are taking the route I advised them to." They crossed to the further bank and proceeded on their journey, feasting their eyes on the beautiful scenery of hill and dale, forest and stream, mountain and valley. At noon, they broke their journey (for they had covered a long way since morning) on the banks of the sacred Ganga, the delightful resort of saintly ascetics. The sight filled the brothers and the sages with supreme joy, the broad waters forming the home of many a swan and other gay aquatic bird sporting fearlessly. There they pitched their quarters and having bathed in the holy river, they offered libations

of water to the manes of the departed. Then devout worship to the sacred Fire and a hearty meal of the sweet food offered thereunto. Once again they met and sat round Visvamitra, of wondrous wisdom, when Rama took upon himself to draw out the sage and started the conversation.

"Master mine, great is my desire to know how the Ganga, abiding in the high heavens, came down to the dark Earth and flowing through the three worlds entered the Lord of Waters."

Questioned thus, Visvamitra proceeded to recount the origin and the history of Ganga. "Himavan—the monarch of mountains and the storehouse of everything rich and valuable—had by his wife Manorama, the graceful daughter of Meru, two daughters of charming beauty. Ganga was the elder and Uma the younger. The Devas prayed Himavan to grant them the presence of Ganga to accomplish certain ends of theirs. With a philanthropic heart did he allow them to take her away, the holy river whose water purifies everything it touches. Glad beyond all description at the ready affability of the father, the Devas invited her to their world, ever intent upon doing good to all beings. But Uma the younger, steadfast in virtue and purity, entered upon a long and difficult course of Tapas, at the end of which, her parent gave her as wife to Rudra, a meet bride-groom for the world-honored maiden of mighty spiritual energy. And now, Rama, have I related unto you, as well as I can, the origin of Ganga and Uma, the daughters of Himavan and the honored objects of the World's worship; as also how Ganga of Three Courses went to the region of the Shining Ones. The holy stream before you is none other than she, who from her mountain home in the Himalaya, carried her sin-cleansing waters to the high heavens of the Immortals.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Uma's Curse.

The brothers listened to the recital with pleasure and respect and when the Master had ended, Rama questioned him again. "Wonderful indeed is what you have related and holy ; and now deign to enlighten us on the history of the elder daughter of the Monarch of Mountains. Tell us in detail, for thou knowest best, her birth in Heaven and Earth. How did she come to take three different courses and purify the three worlds ? Narrate her adventures therein and how she came to bear her name Tripathaga."

Thus addressed, the sage of immeasurable spiritual lustre, descanted at length on the wonderful narrative to the assembled ascetics. "Of yore, Mahadeva, the Black-throated, of boundless energy, took Uma unto wife, and overpowered with desire, began to disport himself with her Hundreds of years passed away and Mahadeva knew it not. But there was no issue born of them ; whereat, Brahma and the Devas began to tremble for the consequences. If a son should chance to be born unto these, who could bear him ? So they approached the Divine One and prayed unto him in trembling accents, " Supreme Lord! Thou art ever intent upon the welfare of the worlds Turn a merciful ear to the prayers of Thy children, the Angels of Light. The worlds are unable to bear the fiery energy of Thine. Engage Thyself with the Great Mother in Brahma Tapas. Have pity on the worlds ; restrain Thy energy in Thy own body. Protect Thou all beings ; it behoves Thee not to annihilate them."

" Be it so" replied Mahadeva. "I and Uma shall retain our respective energies within our own bodies. Let the worlds rest in peace and your hearts too. But, my energy

has moved out of its receptacle and must break out ; whom then have you among yourselves to receive it?"

" The earth, O Lord, will take unto her Thy energy that might happen to escape Thee."

Then Mahadeva let out his energy on the earth and enveloped her entirely with her mountains and forests. Thereafter, the Gods spoke to Agni " Enter thou the energy of Siva, terrible to approach and let Vayu assist thee therein."

Permeated by Agni, it was transformed into a white mountain and in course of time, a clump of holy reeds sprang thereupon, brilliant as the Sun or the Fire. And from it was born Kartikeya, of great energy, the son of Agni.

Threat Gods and sages praised high Siva and Uma, their hearts filled with joy at the great danger being averted. But Uma, the daughter of the mountain-king, spoke bitter words and sharp to the assembled Gods. "Reap ye the fruit of your crooked ways. Ye have caused me grief and disappointment ; and for your pains take this my curse upon you." Forthwith she took up water and, her whole frame glowing with rage and her eyes red with the fire of wrath, launched a terrible doom at the trembling Gods. "Ye that have dared to interfere with my pleasures, ye that have dared to come between me and the dearest object of my desires—son to gladden my heart, ye shall never have sons born unto ye of your own wives. From this moment, your wives shall be childless."

Next she returned to the affrighted Earth and her anger shot out against her. "Vile creature, many shall be thy forms and many thy lords. Evil-minded One, thou envied me a son and succeeded in depriving me of one ; but my wrath has power to deny thy heart any comfort arising from a child born unto thy loins."

Rudra glanced an eye of pity at the Devas, who, like guilty things, hung down their heads in shame; and proceeding to the North-west, engaged himself in stern Tapas in the dark woods that clothe the charming slopes of the Himalaya.

Thus have you heard from me, the narrative of Uma the daughter of the mountain. Now shall I relate unto you, the origin of Ganga, the elder sister."

CHAPTER 37.

The Birth of Kartikeya.

Meanwhile, the Devas wanted a general to lead them against the Asuras and they approached the Grand-Sire and prayed unto him for one. "Lord, he whom you gave unto us to lead our armies, is ever engaged in Tapas along with his consort Uma. Advise us what to do next. Do we not look unto you for help, guidance and support? The welfare of the worlds is dearer unto you ; do you point out the course of action best for us."

The four-faced One calmed the fears of the Shining Ones and spoke to them encouragingly. "The words of the Great Mother shall prove true and you shall not have children born unto you of your own wives ; never shall it be otherwise. Now, Agni shall bring forth a son of Ganga, who is even now purifying your worlds. He shall be the General of the Gods and the terror of his foes. Uma, her sister, shall take the child unto her heart and he shall be to her even as the child of her womb.

These words rejoiced the hearts of the Gods ; they took reverent leave of their Leader and went back even as

they came. Proceeding to the Kailasa, rich in metals, gold and gems, they directed Agni to bring forth a son to accomplish their ends. "Oh, thou! the Leader of the Gods and the Light of the world! help us in our need and bring us good. Of great splendour thou, direct thy energy towards Ganga, the daughter of the Monarch of mountains."

"It shall be even as you desire" replied the Lord of the Fire and approaching Ganga, said to her, "The gods desire that thou bear in thy womb my unfailing energy and bring forth a son to serve their purpose." "With great pleasure" replied she and assumed a divine form, whereat he marvelled greatly; and discharging his fiery energy on all sides, he permeated her in all her limbs with his fierce might. And Ganga was penetrated through and through, even unto the utmost ends of her body. But it was too much even for her, the all purifying One; and she cried out unto the Priest of the Gods in utter helplessness. "Lord, I feel powerless to bear within me thy terrible energy that is even now consuming me." Even as she spoke, the flames grew and grew until the agony became too intense for her.

Thereupon, Agni, out of the great pity that wrung his heart, said unto her, "If so, Ganga, let out that which is in thy womb at the foot of Himavan; may be it will relieve thee of your pain and misery." The holy river gladly hastened to obey him and the refulgent Embryo was directed through the various streams that had their origin in her, And what came forth from her womb was of the hue of the molten gold and was known in the world from that day as Gold, pure and shining From the pungent element thereof were produced copper and black iron, while the impure parts of it were converted into brass and lead. Thus were the diverse metals brought forth into existence and grew apace. The mighty mountain turned of the colour of gold and the forests around it were filled with the unbearably

bright energy of that which proceeded from Ganga's womb. Thenceforth that gold was known among men by the name Jatarupa, radiant even as fire. The trees, the grass, the creepers and everything therein was converted into gold, Kanchana, so called.

Indra and the other gods arranged that the Krittikas should nurse the boy. They took him as their child and upon a promise thereunto from the Devas, suckled him. " This boy," said they, " nourished by you from the milk of your breasts, shall take your name and the world shall know him as Kartikeya. Unparalleled shall be his renown in the worlds." The Krittikas washed him free and pure of the fœtal impurities that adhered to his body, when he dropped from the womb of Ganga at the foot of the Himalaya. " Skanda he shall be called" exclaimed the Devas, " as he was dropped from the womb ;" and Kartikeya was known by that name also.

The Divine boy shone in his supreme radiance even as the smokeless flame. Milk streamed forth from the breasts of the Krittikas and wonderful to behold! the child put forth six heads and six mouths to draw his sustenance from his six foster mothers. In the short space of a day, he grew unto his full height and strength. Of matchless grace and beauty, it was but child's play to him to put to rout the assembled hosts of the Daityas. The Celestial hosts gathered round him with peans of joy and with common consent crowned him as their Lord and Leader and installed him in his proud post.

Thus have I narrated unto you, Rama, the wonderful episode of Ganga and the birth of Kartikeya from her. Supremely holy is this and he whose heart is drawn in devotion and reverence, towards the Divine Child, his days shall never grow less on earth ; and blessed with sons and grand-

sons without end, he shall, when he quits that body, be taken unto the highest heavens, even where Kartikeya resides."

CHAPTER 38.

Sagara.

Here ended his tale and Visvamitra took up another narrative. "Rama, my son, there lived an ancestor of thine by name Sagara, a righteous ruler and a great hero; and Ayodhya was his capital. His heart yearned for a son, but in vain. Kesini, the eldest daughter of the ruler of Vidarbha, was his first wife, truthful of speech and righteous minded; and Sumati, the fairest of the daughters of the earth, was his second wife, the child of Arishtanemi. He retired to the Bhrigu Prasravana among the Himalayas, and along with his wives performed stern Tapas. A hundred years passed over his resolute head, when Bhrigu, the best of those that speak truth, was pleased by his Tapas, conferred upon him a boon. "A mighty race shall spring out of thy loins, and thy glory shall be unparalleled on the earth and undying. One son shalt thou have, through whom thy race shall continue on earth; and thy other wife shall give thee 60,000 sons." Thereupon the queens approached him reverently with joined hands and glad hearts. "Thy words shall ever come to pass; but which of us shall have one son and which many? Deign thou to enlighten us on this vital point." "It is for you to choose," replied the righteous Bhrigu, "one son who will continue your line or many sons, famous valiant and energetic beyond conception. Suit yourselves."

Then Kesini chose before the king a single son to propagate the race; and Sumati, the niece of Garuda, chose

60,000 sons famous and mighty. His purpose served, the king and his queens returned to their kingdom.

In course of time, Kesini, the elder, brought forth a son who was named Asamanjas, while Sumati conceived a lump of flesh. They broke it and forth issued 60,000 sons. The nurses brought them up in vessels of clarified butter, until they arrived to years of maturity.

The eldest son, Asamanjas, amused himself with throwing the children of the townsmen into the dark waters of the Sarayu and laughed at their dying agonies; so, yielding to the prayers of his subjects and to his own unerring sense of justice and duty, Sagara banished that wicked son of his, a terror to his people and an eyesore to the good. But Amsuman, his valiant son, endeared himself to all, high and low and was the idol of their hearts.

Long years after, the thought came to Sagara that he would celebrate a sacrifice. He consulted his priests and chaplains well versed in the Vedas and set about the holy rite."

CHAPTER 39.

Sagara's Horse-Sacrifice.

When the narrative came to an end, Rama said to Visvamitra with a pleased heart "Hail to thee, thou Holy One! Great is my desire to hear the story in all its details of how my ancestor celebrated that sacrifice?" Greatly amused at the eagerness displayed by Rama, Visvamitra replied with a smile. "Nothing would give me greater pleasure. See you yon abode of Snow and Ice, the sky-topped Himalaya. He is the father-in-law of the Black Throated One and faces

proudly the far famed Vindhya ; and between them lies a broad and smiling land. Regard it as one of the holiest spots on the earth, for, countless have been the sacrifices performed therein ; and your ancestor of honored memory, the righteous Sagara, celebrated his Aswamedha there. Amsuman, the favourite grandson of the monarch, was directed to go along with the consecrated horse and guard it. A mighty warrior was he, King Sagara and a famous general ; and while he was duly conducting the sacrifice, Indra assumed the shape of a Rakshasa and spirited away the consecrated horse. Thereat, the sacrificial priests cried out to the king "The consecrated horse has been taken away on this all important day. Slay the robber and bring back the horse. Such a defect as this is fraught with danger to all of us. So, see to it that the sacrifice comes to a safe and speedy end."

Thereupon, the mighty monarch turned to his sons (there were 60,000 of them) and addressed them in the pride of his power and glory,. "No room see I for any Rakshasa to interfere with this sacrifice of mine, conducted as it is by such able priests as these, with souls purified by powerful Mantras. So, heed ye these words of mine ; go forth, my sons and search this sea-girt earth through and through, every inch of it if ye come not upon them. And I shall stay here, consecrated, with my grandson and the priests, till the horse come back."

Ordered thus by their honored sire, the valiant sons of Sagara issued forth with on their fearless quest with cheerful hearts. They searched the surface of the earth from end to end, but found not the horse nor the thief. Then they began to delve into the earth, a yojana every one of them, with their adamantine nails, with tridents hard as thunderbolts, and with terrible ploughshares. Whereupon, the patient Earth, thus pierced in her vitals, began to emit loud cries of distress, rendered all the more terrible by the fearful shrieks of the

dying Nagas, Asuras, Rakhshasas and other mighty creatures, whom, in their wantonness, the infuriated sons of Sagara slaughtered by thousands. Yet they dug into the bowels of the earth for 60,000 yojanas and ranged far and wide through the mountainous Jambudwipa. Thereupon the gods, the Gandhravas, the Asuras and the Pannagas, sought out the Great Ancient and addressed him with affrighted and woe-begone countenances. "Lord! behold these wicked sons of Sagara piercing into the very bowels of the earth and slaying the creatures therein by hundreds and by thousands. Hear them shouting. 'Lo! there goes the thief! there is the daring wretch who has laid his impious hands' on the sacred horse and spoiled the precious sacrifice! and countless myriads go down before their blind fury."

CHAPTER 40.

The Wrath of Kapila.

The Father o all beings listened to these words of the trembling Celestials who were out of their wits through fear of destruction. "This earth" said he "and everything it contains belongs to the Lord Vasudeva, who, as Kapila, supports it for all time; and these wicked princes shall, of a truth, be consumed by the fire of His wrath. The delving of the earth and the destruction of the short-lived sons of Sagara have been fore-ordained."

The celestials departed to their abodes with a glad heart. And great was the uproar caused by the valiant sons of Sagara delving into the bowels of the earth. Having thus sought above and below, they came back to their sire and said to him reverently. "We have searched the entire earth through and through and put to death powerful and mighty beings, Gods, Danavas, Rakshasas, Pisachas, Uragas, and

Kinnaras, by hundreds ; but we have not set our eyes upon the horse nor the daring robber. Hail ! mighty monarch ! we await thy further orders."

Thereat Sagara was exceedingly wroth and cried out "Delve further and yet further, even unto the innermost limits. Find me out the robber and come back with the horse at any cost."

Thus ordered thereto, the 60,000 sons of Sagara dug even unto the Rasatala, until they came upon the huge elephant Virupaksha, supporting on his head mountain-like, the entire globe with its mountains, hills, forests, rivers, towns and hamlets. When the Mighty One shakes his weary head during the Parva days to ease himself, then men have what they call an earthquake. They went round him and paid him due worship, whereafter they pursued their undeviating course. Having pierced through the Rasatala in the east, they turned to the south and lighted upon another elephant of vast proportions, Mahapadma, likewise supporting the entire globe on his head—a sight that filled them with amazement. They went round him too and piercing through the west, observed another elephant, Saumanasa, who bore the earth in that quarter. Him too they reverenced and made kind enquiries of, after which they set about to pierce towards the North, when there came to view the snow-white Bhadra, of immense proportions, upon whose broad head rested but lightly the entire mass of the globe in that quarter. Having paid unto him due reverence, they took leave of him and pierced yet deeper into the earth ; coming to the North-east they dug deeper yet, furious with disappointment, that endowed them with superhuman strength and fierce speed.

When, lo! there appeared before their startled eyes Kapila, the incarnation of the Eternal Vasudeva ; and hard by, the long-sought-for horse, grazing quietly, the innocent

cause of all their trouble and misfortune. Almost besides themselves with joy at their success, they rushed forth with eager hearts ; but, the sight of the Holy One, whom they concluded to be the robber of the horse, roused them to insensate fury ; and with eyes inflamed with wrath, they flew at the sage, armed with spades and swords, shovels ploughshares and mattocks. "Stop thief ! stop thief !" not one of them was mute. "You are the wicked wretch that spirited away the sacrificial horse and right dearly shall you pay for it Know you who have come for you ?. Even the sons of Sagara, the terrible." Hardly were those impious words out of the mouth of the doomed sons of Sagara, than the wrath of the mighty sage blazed forth. 'Hum,' he cried ; the eye had scarcely time to wink, when the 60,000 sons of Sagara vanished from sight ; a heap of ashes marked the place where they had stood a moment ago, in their proud strength and fiery manhood.

CHAPTER 41.

Amsuman's Quest.

Finding his sons had been away an unconscionable long time, Sagara turned to his grandson who was resplendent in his own energy, " Brave you are and well educated ; you are not behind your forefathers in prowess or energy. Bring me news of your parents and of him who has made away with the horse. The beings that inhabit the interior of the Earth are of terrible might and power ; arm yourself against them with your bow and sword. Offer reverence to those that deserve it and spare not those that might seek to hinder you ; come back unto me with news of success and enable me to complete this sacrifice."

Thus directed by his noble grandsire, Amsuman set out in hot haste on his quest, armed with sword and bow. Following his grandsire's, direction, he soon came upon the path dug into the bowels of the earth by his valiant forefathers. He took that away and came upon the Dig-gaja honored by the Daityas, Danavas, Rakshasas, Pisachas, Pannagas, and Uragas. He went round it, inquired after its welfare and respectfully asked for news of his parents, as also of the horse-thief; to which the Elephant replied "Son of Asamanjas! soon shalt thou come back with success and the horse with you." The other Elephants, whom he came upon, confirmed the glad tidings. "Soon shall we see you come back honored and with the long-lost horse." Extremely intelligent and no mean speakers themselves, they encouraged him with the fresh hopes by their prophetic assertions. On he hastened to where his ill-starred fathers lay, a heap of ashes. His heart burst with grief at the miserable sight and in a loud voice he bewailed the untimely and shameful fate of his uncles. And there was the sacrificial horse grazing all innocently near by, as if *it* was not their evil destiny.

He desired to offer libations of water into their manes, but, search as he would, not a drop of water could he find any where. Casting his eyes around, he espired the uncle of his uncles, even Garuda, the Lord of Birds, shining with the brilliance of the Lord of Fire. And to him spake the valiant Garuda "Grieve not, noble son; they deserved their death. They perished even in their pride, burnt to ashes by the inscrutable might of Kapila's glances; and to these, libations of earthly water would do no good. Nothing but the sacred waters of Ganga, the eldest daughter of Himavan, the all purifying stream, should wash these ungodly ones reduced to a heap of ashes, *then and then alone* shalt thou be able to raise these 60,000 victims of foolish temerity to

the Abóde of the Blessed. Take thou the horse back with thee and enable thy grandfather to complete the sacrifice."

And the valiant Amsuman obeyed him with a heavy heart. Soon he stood before his grandsire and acquainted him with the details of his quest, the unhappy fate of his sires and of the advice of Garuda. Sagara listened to the terrible news with a breaking heart and hastened to complete the rite according to the rules. He returned to his capital, but, he could not decide unto himself what course to adopt in the matter of bringing down Ganga to the terrestrial regions; and thus, in doubt and anxiety, in aimless thought and ceaseless remorse, did he pass away to the Regions of the Immortals. And his reign on earth was 32,000 years.

CHAPTER 42.

Bhagiratha's Penance.

When Sagara was gathered unto his forefathers, his subjects decided that his righteous grandson Amsuman should reign over them. He was a mighty monarch, Amsuman and bore a son by name Dilipa, of peerless fame. And resigning the kingdom unto his hands, did Amsuman seek the Holy Heights to perform fearful austerities. Years 32,000 passed away and unto him in his forest hermitage came the call to Heaven, to which he departed, crowned with undying glory. And Dilipa, coming to know of the destruction of this grandfathers, was overwhelmed with grief and at a loss how to act. " How shall I bring down Ganga? How shall I offer them libations of holy water? How shall I deliver them from their miserable plight?" This sorrow ate into his heart, day and night. And unto him endowed with Divine Wisdom through his steadfast adherence to

Right, was born a son, Bhagiratha, who, in saintliness of character, excelled his father, if that were possible. Many a sacrifice did Dilipa celebrate; and for 32,000 years the people rejoiced under his benign rule. But, unable to come to any definite conclusion as to how to raise his forefathers to heaven, he died of a broken heart, having lived, as he thought, an aimless life. He installed his son in his place and won the Heaven of Indra by his peerless merit.

Bhagiratha, the royal sage, had everything he could wish for—righteousness, spiritual might; but he yearned in vain for a son to continue his line on the earth. So, entrusting his kingdom to his able ministers, he resolved to bring down Ganga and he took himself to the sacred Gokarna, where he spent long years, thousands of them, in performing terrible austerities. Placing himself in the midst of five fires, he withdrew his senses into his heart; with his arms raised high above his head, he bent all his powerful will to accomplish his purpose, taking but a slight sustenance once a month. Then unto him thus engaged in his holy task, there came Brahma, the Lord of beings, the Grandsire, and in his wake, the Angels of Light and spoke thus to the high-souled One, "Bhagiratha! Lord of men! pleased am I with you and the unparalleled Tapas you have gone through. Ask of me what you wilt and you shall have it." And unto the Great Father the noble-hearted king replied with reverently clasped hands, "Lord! If I have found favour with Thee, if my Tapas is to bear any fruit; even this I would have at Thy hands. May the sons of Sagara, every one of them, receive libations water at my hands. May the holy waters of celestial Ganga flow over their ashes. May the Great Ones rejoice in heaven for ever. And let me have a son to gladden my heart. And more than any other thing, this boon would I crave of Thee. May the race of Iskhwaku ever remain upon Earth."

To him spake back, in words sweet and glorious, the Four-faced One, the great Fashioner of Men and Worlds, "Mighty hero thou, Bhagiratha, it is a royal request and shall be even as thou desirest. The royal race of Ikshwaku shall owe its undying fame to thee. Ganga, the first-born of the lofty Himavan, shall obey thy behests; but the Earth cannot stand the force of the Celestial River as it comes down from the regions on high. I see no one that could bear it safely, unless it be the Wielder of the Trident, even Mahadeva. Hence, do thou seek to engage him in that mighty task." Having thus advised the king and having directed Ganga herself as to what she should do, he went back to his Radiant World, accompanied by the celestial hosts.

CHAPTER 43.

Descent of Ganga.

So spake Brahma and went away, and Bhagiratha went through another year of hard austerities. With arms lifted high over his head, straight as a pine, motionless as a rock, he supported himself solely on his toes. Thus he remained day and night, the air his only food, self-controlled and calm.

When the dreadful year came to an end, Maheswara, the Spouse of the golden-hued Uma, stood before the royal sage; and the World-honored spake, in accents sweet and grand, "You have won my favor and I shall do your pleasure. I shall even bear upon my head the Daughter of the Mountain."

Thereupon the noble river Ganga, honored of all beings, increased her size and force unhearable and from the lofty

heavens, fell upon the peaceful head of Siva. "For," thought she, of irresistable might, "I will carry away Sankara along with me, and enter the nether regions." The Three-eyed Hara was highly wroth at this overweening pride of Ganga and resolved to hide her from all sight. So, when the Holy Stream fell on the sacred head of Siva, even like unto Himavan, she could never come down on earth, though she tried her best, entangled as she was in the maze of Mahadeva's lofty coils of matted hair. And her senses giddy with aimless wandering through the pathless labyrinths, for countless years she found not her way out. Seeing which, Bhagiratha again set himself to please Siva through austerities stern.

Siva's heart grew soft towards him and he let her down gently to the earth, even where the Lake Bindu stood, Ganga came down from his coil sin seven streams, of which Hladini, Plavini and Nalini carried their pure and holy waters to the east, Suchakshu, Sita and Sindhu flowed through the happy kingdoms of the west; and the last followed in the wake of the royal sage Bhagiratha, who, shining in his lustre, went before in his beautiful car. From the high heavens she fell on the head of Siva and from thence to the earth; and her waters rushed fast and furious with a mighty sound, rendered the more terrible by the countless fish, tortoises, porpoises, and other aquatic creatures, ceaselessly falling from on high. And hosts of the Celestials came there, blazing in their effulgence, to behold that wonderful Descent of Ganga into the regions of the Earth—Devas, Rishis, Gandharvas, Yakshas, and Siddhas; all seated on their countless swift-coursing cars huge as cities, on horses and noble elephants they stationed themselves along the firmament, which, without the slightest suspicion of a cloud, shone as if with the splendor of myriads of suns, thrown back from the bands of Celestials and their brilliant ornaments. The porpoises and the fish falling down the

waters flashed like lightnings along the welkin; and the thousand white sprays thrown up by the waves on all sides reminded one of the autumn clouds with crowds of swans flying athwart them. Now swift, now slow; now straight like an arrow, now crooked like a miser's heart; now with a sudden fall, now shooting upwards; now mighty waves striking against one another and rising high in the air, anon fall upon the earth with a sound of thunder. Descending upon the head of Siva and from there to the earth, the waters became purer and holier. The gods, the sages and the Gandharvas that came down to the earth, touched the Holy Waters, rendered unmeasurably so by having come into contact with the body of Siva. They that had fallen down on earth through curses dire, washed themselves pure of their sins in its sacred waters and regained their lost homes in the heavens; the whole world rejoiced thereat and their souls were white as driven snow.

The royal sage Bhagiratha went before on his splendid car; and Ganga, obedient to his least wish, followed in his footsteps. Gods, Sages, Daityas Danavas, Rakshasas, Gandharvas, Yakasas. Kinnaras, Uragas, and the Apsarasas followed joyfully the Holy River, that, teeming with countless aquatic creatures, coursed after the car of Bhagiratha. Wherever the king went, there was the Holy Ganga, the first and the best of streams, the destroyer of all sins. On its way, she took it into her wilful heart to flow through the sacrificial grounds of the holy sage, Jahnu, and swept away everything therein. Such pride and audacity worked up the mighty sage to an uncontrollable pitch of anger and he drew into himself the waters of Ganga. Verily it was wonderful to be hold. The gods, the sages, and the Gandharvas were struck with amazement and sought to soothe the wounded dignity of the great sage by every mark of honor and respect. "This Ganga" said they "shall be

henceforth known as the Daughter of Jahnu." Then the sage of immeasurable energy was somewhat mollified and let out the waters through his ears ; and hence she earned the names "The Daughter of Jahnu" and "Jahnavi." Again she resumed her course behind the car of Bhagiratha, until she reached the vast ocean ; and thence proceeded towards the Rasatala for the accomplishment of his purpose.

The royal sage, having, after unheard—of difficulties, taken Ganga along with him to the nether regions, cast his eyes, with a sinking heart, upon his ancestors reduced to a heap of ashes. The holy waters of the Ganga bathed the pile and the owners thereof, purified of their sins, ascended to the High Heavens.

CHAPTER 44.

The End of the Quest.

Accompanied by Ganga, the king reached the ocean and came to that place below the Earth where his ancestors lay reduced to ashes.

When they had been washed by the holy waters, Brahma, the Lord of the worlds, came to the place and said, "The 60,000 sons of the noble Sagara have been freed from their evil fate and raised by you to heaven, even like unto the gods themselves; and *as long as the waters of the ocean shall endure on earth* even so long shall these enjoy the bliss of Swarga along with the Immortal Dwellers thereof. This Ganga shall be to you as a first-born daughter and shall be celebrated in the world under the names you gave her—Ganga, Tripathaga, Divya, and Bhagirathi. She flows through the three worlds and hence her name Tripathaga. Offer libations of water unto the manes

of your grandfathers, every one of them and accomplish your vow. They that went before you were unable to accomplish their object, highly famous and born of righteous ancestry though they were. Amsuman of unequalled energy, desired to bring down Ganga and succeeded not. The royal sage, your sire Dilipa, of noble attributes and like unto the great sages in Spiritual Energy, wrought hard to bring down Ganga, but the rays of success dispelled not the gloom of his heart, albeit he was unswerving in the discharge of his kingly duties and equal to me in ascetic merit. But, you have been able to accomplish your high resolve; and, best of men that you are, you have earned the highest glory ever given unto mortals to possess and ever approved of by the best; you have reached the loftiest pinnacle of righteousness, in that you have brought down the holy Ganga. Bathe in the sacred waters and rise pure and endowed with high religious merit. Forget not to offer libations of water unto the manes of your ancestors. I shall go back unto my world and give you leave to do the same." Thus spoke the Grandsire of all beings, the great Brahma and departed to his seat in the highest heaven, even as he came.

Thereupon, the royal sage Bhagiratha discharged his duties by his fore-fathers, even as the holy books lay it down; his vow accomplished, he returned to his capital with enhanced lustre and glory and ruled his kingdom well and wisely. The world rejoiced when the king came back again among them and men knew not sorrow nor anxiety under him, but lived in happy content, every desire of theirs gratified.

Thus have I narrated unto you at great length, Rama, the episode of Ganga. All hail to you! thou noble one and may every good go with you. Let us disperse, for the time of the evening prayers is close at hand. This narrative is of extraordinary virtue; it realises for you all your wishes—fame, length of years, offspring, and the highest heavens. And

you have no better way of pleasing the Pitris and the Devas than by reciting this before the regenerate ones. He who listens to this with whole-souled attention and a devout heart, never desires in vain; his sins fall away from him and his days increase on earth and his glory."

CHAPTER 45.

The Churning of the Ocean.

He ended in the midst of profound silence; for, in awe-struck silence his hearers drank in his words with their ears and hearts. Rama was the first to break the spell and speak. "Reverend Master! these episodes of the coming down of Ganga and the digging of the ocean by the sons of Sagara, how wonderful and strange!"

The audience took respectful leave of the sage to seek repose; but, the princes lay awake, pondering over the marvellous recital, until the small hours of the dawn stole upon them. They rose betimes and having gone through the morning observances, approached Visvamitra and said, "Holy One! the night passed away all too soon, revolving over the wonderful stories narrated by you. A boat, specially furnished for such holy ascetics as you, awaits your pleasure. Shall we cross this sacred stream over to the other bank?

"So be it" replied Visvamitra, and very soon they were on the other side of the river. They rested there awhile and from where they sat the towers of the renowned Visala rose into view. Soon they resumed their journey and were on their way towards the capital that vied in magnificence with the very abode of the Immortals. Rama took the opportunity to question the Master about the city. "May I request to know which royal race rules here at present?"

Visvamitra caught the hint and proceeded to recount the past history of Visala. "In the last Krita Yuga, the sons of Diti were very powerful; while the sons of Aditi were mighty and walked in the way of Good. 'How shall we escape the decrepitude of age and the horrors of death?' So thought they, the Devas and the Asuras. At length, they hit upon a plan and resolved to churn the Milky Ocean and partake of the Ambrosia that would spring therefrom. That would ensure them Immortality. Well, they set to work in dead earnest; the Milky Ocean was the churning pot and the Mount Mandara, the churn; Vasuki, the king of serpents, was the rope, and they churned with unabated energy for thousands of years. Then, Vasuki, their rope, gave out, and vomited deadly poison from his many mouths; while, in the height of his agony, he crunched to atoms the hard granite of the rocks.

First rose the fiery venom Halahala, and began to consume the affrighted worlds and everything therein—men and gods, birds and beasts. The Lords of Light sought the presence of Mahadeva, in his Home of Ice and Snow and lifted up their hearts and hands to him in humble prayer. "Lord of Beings! Rudra of terrible energy! Giver of all Good! we take our refuge in Thee and seek the shadow of Thy feet. Save us, Oh Lord! from this cruel Fate. Thou art our stay and support."

And to them thus engaged in heart-whole prayer and humble entreaty, there came the Lord Vishnu, his broad shoulders graced with the mighty Conch and Discus. And to the Wielder of the Trident spake he in accents of persuasive melody. "These gods here, churn the Milky Ocean and have come to offer you the first fruits of their hard labor. For," said he with a charming smile. "You, brother mine, are the first-born among them and it behoves you to accept this Halahala as your portion and save them from destruction."

He disappeared then and there, even while the sound of his sweet voice was still in the ears of his hearers. And the Moon-Crested One, moved thereunto by the abject fear of the gods and the request of Vishnu, repaired unto the Ocean of Milk and swallowed the dread Halahala, even as though it were a delicious draught of Ambrosia. His mission of mercy accomplished, he returned to his mountain-home and left the gods to resume their arduous work.

But, a fresh misfortune was in store for them—the Mount Mandara, their churn, sank from view, deep deep into the abysmal regions of Patala. Once again the Angels of Heaven, raised their voices in earnest supplication to the Guardian of the Worlds, even the Lord Vishnu. "All creation lives and moves in Thee and has its being; but we are proud to claim a place in the warmest corner of Thy heart. Lead us out of this mishap and find a way to keep the mountain firm, while we churn the sea."

And Hari, the Soul of Mercy, laid himself in the deep waters as a mighty Tortoise and bare the mountain on his back, while his extended hands grasped it at the top and steadied the whirling mass; and wonderful to behold! he stood among the gods and churned as assiduously as any.

A thousand years of hard toil and there arose from amidst the seething waters, Dhanvantari, the God of Health, with staff and water-pot. Next the lovely Apsarasas, sixty thousand in number (their attendants, Rama dear, are past count). They were so called (Apsarasas) since the Charming Ones formed the essence (Rasa) that sprang from the churning of the mighty waters (apas.) The gods would have none of them, nor the Asuras; hence they came to be common women, free to all.

Next came forth Varuni, the daughter of Varuna, the Lord of Waters, and looked about for some one who

would take her to wife. But the sons of Diti turned away from her in haughtiness and pride; whereat, the gods took that stainless beauty unto themselves with a glad heart. Hence the name 'Asuras' that the sons of Diti went by (those that accepted not Sura or Varuni); while the gods rejoiced in the appellation of Suras (the Lords of Sura).

Next Uchchaisravas, the Prince of horses; then Kaustubha, the Gem of divine lustre; and last, the Amrita, the Waters of Immortality.

It was the apple of discord thrown in the midst of the celestials and they fought for it tooth and nail. Terrible was the battle that ensued between the sons of Aditi on the one hand and the Asuras, and the Rakshasas on the other; and the hearts of all beings quaked in wild dismay thereat. Fearful was the carnage among the Asuras, and they were about exterminated. When the ungodly sons of Diti were thus laid law, the Lord Vishnu, of unthinkable might, appeared among the combatants as a fascinating siren (a dream of beauty to lure away the hearts of the unrighteous ones, verily an illusion cast by the Master of Illusions), and bare away the hard-won Amrita; and they that tried to bar his way, the unfortunate Asuras, fell no more to rise For was he not the ruler of the Universe, the Supreme One, who waxes not nor wanes? Thus were the impious brood of Diti overwhelmed by the Angels of Peace, the servants of the Lord; and Indra, their king and leader, regained his empire over the worlds, gods and mortals, saints and sages and ruled wisely and well.

CHAPTER 46.

The birth of the Maruts.

When Diti saw that her numerous sons, the Asuras, were destroyed by the Devas, her heart was heavy with

grief; approaching her husband Kasyapa, she prayed to him in all humility, "My children have been done to death, every one of them, by the powerful Devas, sprung of thee. I pray thee extend thy grace unto me and enable me to go through a course of austerities, whereby I might beget a son who would be the death of Indra."

Kasyapa, of boundless might, heard her out and his heart was wrung with pity at the mother's grief "Be it as you desire. Observe for a thousand years a strict vow and holy, pure in body and heart; and you shall have of me a son who will lord it over the three worlds." He passed his hands over her body, gave her his blessings and departed to resume his Tapas.

With a glad heart, Diti betook herself to the holy Kusaplavana and took upon herself to observe a long and difficult vow. And upon her thus employed, did Indra wait upon with humble reverence all the time He supplied her with the sacred grass, firesticks, water, fruits, roots and fire and every other article that she might require; he pressed her limbs when she was tired, fanned her when she was hot, and was ever her right hand and shadow.

Years 9990 passed away in this wise, when one day, Diti turned with a bright face to Indra (he was ever at her side anticipating her least wish) and said, "My dear, your father Kasyapa was kind enough to accord me a boon, that I would get an excellent son, if I observed a course of religious practices he instructed me in. Only ten short years of this severe ordeal and you will have the pleasure of beholding your younger brother. True it is I resolved upon bringing forth a son who would put you down; but, my heart has been won over to you by your sweet kindness and watchful service. It shall be my care to bring about

perfect harmony between you both, so that the three worlds shall rest in peace and happiness."

And upon them so speaking, the heat of noon came on apace; and Diti, worn out with her fasts and penances, chanced, (inexorable Fate impelling her thereto) to fall asleep in a careless posture, the hair of her head brushing her feet. Indra, ever on the watch for the slightest slip, saw that she was impure and laughed in joy and derision. "Fool that you are! you fondly imagine you have successfully accomplished your long course of Tapas and pride yourself on being about to attain the result of your severe efforts." Then the dauntless Lord of the Angels made his entrance into her body and with his weapon, the sharp-pointed Vajra, hacked the embryo into seven pieces; whereat, it began to set up a loud and pitiful wail.

"Cry not, cry not," replied Indra; but all the same he went on with his dreadful task.

Diti awoke; and from the depths of her agonised heart broke out the words, 'Slay not, slay not.'

Indra desisted at the commands of his mother; coming out of her body, he stood before her with reverently clasped hands and said, "Mother mine! you happened to fall asleep during the day and that with the hair of your head touching your feet; you had rendered yourself impure and I but took advantage of the favourable opportunity to rid myself of a rival who was growing to be my Fate. It behoves you to pardon me this offence of mine."

CHAPTER 47.

The birth of the Maruts.

Overwhelmed with sorrow and disappointment, Diti turned to the invincible Indra and said, "Oh thou, the

destroyer of the Asura Vala! verily it was through my fault that this embryo of mine has been cut to pieces and rendered useless. No blame is yours, for, you but did your duty and the hand of Fate directed you. However, it would give me great pleasure if you would grant me a request of mine. These seven pieces shall, gifted with forms of Light, rule over the various air-currents as their Informing Deities. Gagana in the world of Brahma, Sparsa in yours, Vayu in the Bhuvar Loka and Anila, Prana, Pranesvara and Jiva in the four quarters of the world of mortals. These shall range the various regions in peace and happiness and take the name of 'Maruts' that you have given them. It behoves you to do them this favor at least; and I doubt not that it will redound to your own glory and power."

So prayed the much-stricken mother, in accents sweet and persuasive; and Indra bowed reverently over his folded palms and replied, "Mother mine! on my head and eyes be thy commands. Thy sons, these seven brothers of mine, shall course through all the regions, illuminating them with glorious forms of divine lustre". Thus did Indra and his mother Diti make a covenant, which he faithfully observed ever after. And, mutually pleased, they departed to the worlds of the Immortals. And, Rama! *this* is the very spot where Diti was waited upon by Indra during her long and severe course of austerities.

The royal Ikshvaku begat from Alambusa, a son by name Visala, who was the founder of the city that goes by his name. And Hemachandra, Suchandra, Dhumrasva, Srinjaya, Sahadeva, Kusasva, Somadatta of great lustre and renown, and Kakutstha, succeeded one another, father and son. And Sumati, like unto the Gods in radiance, rules at present over the happy Visala and is verily invincible. Through the blessings of their founder Ikshvaku

his descendants by Visala are gifted with length of years, steadfastness in virtue and unparalleled prowess. Rest we here for the night and to-morrow you will have the pleasure of being welcomed by the royal Janaka."

Meanwhile, Sumati, the righteous and holy, was informed of the approach of the great Visvamitra; and with his priests and kinsmen, hastened to offer him welcome. He extended unto his honored guest the highest rites of hospitality and with folded palms, reverently inquired after his welfare. "First and best of sages! thrice-blessed am I, in that you have, of your own accord, been pleased to honor my humble abode with your sacred presence. Surely, great is the favor I have found in your eyes and you have made me the envy of the three worlds."

CHAPTER 48.

Ahalya.

After mutual enquiries of welfare, Sumati addressed himself to the Holy One and said "Hail to thee! these youths, who are they? God-like in their might and of lordly gait, even as the proud monarch of the forests or the majestic elephant or the tiger or the bull; with large and lustrous eyes, like unto the rosy petals of the blown lotus; combining in themselves the graces of the boy and the youth. Lo! how they shine in their martial attire, bow in hand, the sword by their sides and the well-filled quivers peeping from behind. More like those heavenly Twins, the ideals of divine grace and beauty, the Aswins. Be these the gods themselves, come down of their sweet will to this dull earth of ours, from their bright home on high? How chances it they have deigned to come all the way here and on foot? What seek they? Whom are they here for? The Twin Lords of the Day and the Night grace not

the sky more than these princes this fortunate land. Face, features, gestures, gait, speech, the keenest eye cannot distinguish the one from the other. These warlike youths, these lords of men, why have they trod this wild path and dreadful ? May I know the truth that lies behind this ? "

And to his wondering ears did the sage relate the details of their journey—their stay at the Siddhasrama, and the destruction of the Rakshasas at their hands. Mightily pleased was Sumati to have as his guests the noble sons of the ruler of Ayodhya and right royally did he entertain the valiant princes who deserved it so richly. They spent there a happy night and at day-break left for Mithila.

The charming capital of Janaka filled the sages with wonder and delight, and they could not praise it enough.

On their way, Rama noticed a lonely hermitage at the outskirts of the city, old, dilapidated and untenanted. At once he turned to his Master and said " This holy place reminds one of the spot that was graced by your august self, but for the fact that no ascetics bless it with their presence. Who dwelt here last, Master, if I may be allowed to inquire ? "

It required but very little inducement to make Visvamitra hold eloquent discourse on the antecedents of the spot. " Listen to me while I narrate to you the wonderful train of events that culminated in the curse of this lonely hermitage by the great-souled Gautama. One of the fairest spots on earth this was, when he dwelt herein and with his wife, Ahalya, engaged in a long and severe course of Tapas. Why, the very gods frequented it for its rare beauty and almost envied Gautama the possession of it.

The Lord of the celestials loved the fair Ahalya and was ever on his watch for an opportunity to accomplish his wishes ; and one day he got it when the sage was away from

his cottage. Approaching Ahalya in the guise of the holy Gautama, the Holder of Vajra exclaimed, "Oh thou! the fairest form that ever graced the Earth below or the Worlds above, a merciless tyrant is Love; and no rules nor restrictions that man can make, have power to stay his will. I am not master of myself. Full well do I know it is not your season, but what would you have me do? Fold me in your flower soft arms and let me lose myself in an endless dream of bliss".

She knew it was the Ruler of the Celestials that spake those words of delicious love, and not her husband, the sage of restrained passions; but, deep in her heart lurked a tender feeling for the powerful Lord of the Immortals. She lent an ear to the tempter and—was lost. Her long-deferred hopes realized, she spoke to him out of a glad heart.

"Well pleased am I, Lord. and now leave thou this place ere it is too late. One word before we part. Let no fancied sense of security blind thee to the perils of our position. Take good care of thyself and stand between me and the dread consequence of my act of folly".

But Indra laughed away her fears and replied "Fair one! Never can I thank you enough for your sweet condescension to my unworthy self; and now, have I your leave to go?"

He spoke and hastened out of the cottage, all afraid of Gautama, whom his fluttering heart saw everywhere.

And lo! there advanced towards him the subject of his thoughts and fears, the holy Gautama, about to enter his hermitage. Gods and Asuras stood in hushed awe of him, such was his inconceivable might, engendered of severe austerities. Fresh from his bath in the sin cleansing waters, he drew near, the sacred grass in his hand and the

bundle of firesticks. The steady flame of the smokeless Fire shone not with more lustre nor was more terrible in its all-consuming energy. The mighty Lord of the Shining Ones quailed in abject terror before the calm glance of Gautama that pierced into his very soul and read into the inmost depths thereof. His face grew ghastly pale, and to him, there standing false-hearted and unclean be ore the soul of the spotless purity, to him, in the borrowed feathers of the one in whose guise he came to perpetrate his foul deed of shame and iniquity, spoke the irate sage, scarcely able to control his fierce wrath.

"Impious wretch! that host dared to soil my pure abode with this nameless act of wickedness and that in *my* name and in *my* form! It is but insufficient punishment to thee that thou be deprived of what served you to carry out your nefarious purpose. A man be thou to all appearance, but in reality, the mockery of one—a pitiful eunuch." No sooner were the words out of the lips of the angry Gautama, than the scrota of Indra withered and fell away from his body.

Next, he turned himself to Ahalya, Indra's partner in guilt. "Lie thou here for thousands of years, long and weary, ever hungry, thy food the impalpable air and the grey ashes and dust thy cloak. No mortal eye shall see thee; but an unquenchable fire shall ever consume thee. At a future age, there shall come across these wastes one Rama, the son of Dasaratha of unapproachable might. *Then* and then alone shall this dread fate fall away from thee; and honoring your Divine guest, thou shalt shake thyself off for ever from these bonds of foul desire and foolish vanity; *then* shall thy heart know peace and joy; and *then* shalt thou take thy place by my side in all thy fatal beauty."

He took his bright presence away from the ill-fated One and left this holy place for the pleasant peaks of the

Himalaya, where the Angels of Light ever love to dwell; and there, in that calm retreat, did he take up his old course of life and its stern duties.

CHAPTER 49.
Ahalya and Rama.

Deprived of his vital organs, Indra sought out the gods, and the sages and cried out to them, with his senses all in a whirl through fear. "It was for *you* that I undertook this dangerous work. *You* wanted me to somehow or other spoil his Tapas by rousing his anger. And now you perceive the consequences that have followed—myself deprived of virile power and my partner in guilt put away from her husband in anger. But, I have caused him to utter a curse, which has considerably lessened his might and energy acquired by long Tapas. Hence it is but fair and just that you do your duty by me, the instrument of your work and restore to me what I have lost through you."

Then the assembled Devas, the Sages, and the Charanas approached the Fathers and unto them spake Agni, as their spokesman. "Our Lord and Master has imprudently and blinded by passion, ravished the wife of the sage Gautama; and in return, has been cursed for his pains, which has rendered him an object of pity and scorn, in that he has lost his virile power. Justly does he blame us for it, who set him on this task. You will do well to transfer the scrtoa of the goat to him; accept it hereafter as a grateful offering and grant to your votaries the desire of their heart and endless merit besides." The Fathers approved of the suggestion of Agni; they took counsel among themselves and transferred to Indra the scrota of the goat.

Thenceforth the Fathers have gladly accepted the offering of the goat without its scrota and conferred on the

sacrificers the benefits they had enjoyed hitherto. From that day Indra goes about with the scrota of the goat upon him, thanks to the terrible might of Gautama accruing through stern Tapas. Let us now, Rama dear, approach the sacred precincts of the holy hermitage. To you it is given to release from a living death, as existence of nameless horror, the noble Ahalya, the best and fairest in all the worlds, of gods or men."

Ever obedient to the commands of his master, Rama followed Visvamitra into the hermitage; and Lakshmana after him. There they beheld the high-souled dame, her natural brilliance but heightened by the long life of penance and meditation through thousands of years. The Gods and Asuras, nay, the denizens of the worlds above and below, could not bear to gaze at the fiery radiance that surrounded her like a halo. The Demiurge had fashioned her the fairest of the daughters of heaven or earth; and it cost him no little thought and pains! More like some fair creation of a divine artist in the golden hours of his imagination more like the radiant Queen of Night, her glory but dimly veiled by the dewy clouds; more like the blinding effulgence of the noon-day sun perceived through the watery vapours. There she had stood invisible to the eyes of Mortals and Immortals alike, through the curse launched against her by Gautama; but now the hour hast struck for her release from her dire tate and lo! she burst upon the wondering eyes of her visitorss like some sweet vision.

The royal youths hastened to touch her feet in all reverence; while she, bearing in mind the parting directions of her lord, offered unto them the highest rites of hospitality, which they accepted with a pleased heart. Flowers of divine fragrance fell from on high; the Gandharvas and the assembled Apsarasas discoursed sweet music, while the heavenly drums and other martial music thundered over

head. "Bravo" cried the celestial hosts "well and nobly done" and paid high worship to the spouse of Gautama, who shone in all her pristine beauty and glory, purified of all stain by long years of stern Tapas.

Then there came unto them from his far-off retreat in the Himalayas the holy Gautama and the happy pair offered unto Sri Rama divine worship and reverence. Thereafter Gautama resumed his life of calm meditation and holy vows in the company of his wife, now restored to him after countless years of separation and suffering. On his part, the noble Deliverer, honored by the glorious reception accorded to him, took up his march to Mithila in the wake of the Holy One.

CHAPTER 50.

At Mithila.

They proceeded north east and shortly found themselves near the sacrificial grounds of Janaka. "Reverend Sir" said the princes to Visvamitra "splendid indeed are the arrangements that the great-souled Janaka has made for his sacrifice ; far as the eye can view, lovely cottages to house the sages dot the country, each with its ring-fence of wains. Methinks the Brahmanas from the far corners of the land, masters of the Vedas and its mysteries, have graced the occasion by hundreds and by thousands. Point out to us some convenient spot wherein we too may encamp" And accordingly did Visvamitra pitch their quarters in a place well-watered, calm and removed from noise and bustle.

Janaka was at once informed of their arrival and in humble reverence advanced to welcome them. The Holy Satananda of spotless sanctity led the way, while the

other priests followed the Royal Chaplain with the materials of worship. High reverence and meet did they offer unto the honored guest, who deserved it so well ; Visvamitra accepted it with a pleased heart and enquired of the king his health and of the progress of his sacrificial rite. Janaka rendered proper reply to his holy guest and failed not to assure himself of their welfare and their pleasant journey thither. He then turned to Visvamitra and said to him with joined palms. "May it please your Reverence and your holy brethren to honor me by occupying these seats"; which they did accordingly ; and after them Satananda, the other priests, the King and his ministers.

Having seen to it that all were comfortably seated, Janaka turned to Visvamitra and said. "This day, verily, have the gods been pleased to crown the preparations I have made for this sacrifice. To-day it is that I have realised the object of my holy toil in that I have set my eyes on you. Thrice blessed am I and honored above compare in as much as your Reverence has deigned to grace my sacrificial ground with your saintly presence and not less these ascetics of pure vows. Twelve days more—so say the wise ones—and you will see the Gods come down here to accept their shares of the offerings."

He paused and resumed, his face lit up with the joy within. "Hail to thee ? These youths, who are they ? God-like in their might ; of lordly gait even as the proud monarch of the forests or the majestic elephant or the tiger or the bull ; with large and lustrous eyes, like unto the rosy petals of the blown lotus · combining in themselves the graces of the boy and the youth. Lo! how they shine in their martial attire, bow in hand, the sword by their sides and the well-filled quivers peeping from behind. More like those heavenly Twins, the ideals of divine grace and beauty, the Aswins. Are these the Gods

themselves, come down of their sweet will to this dull Earth of ours, from their bright home on high? How chances is it they have deigned to come all the way here on foot? What seek they? Whom are they here for? The Twin Lords of the Day and the Night grace not the sky more than these princes this fortunate land. Face, features, gestures, gait, speech, the keenest eye cannot distinguish the one from the other. These warlike youths, whose sons are they? These lords of men, why have they trod this wild path and dreadful? May I know the truth that lies behind this, the visit of these fair-haired boys to my place."

And to him thus inquiring, did Visvamitra relate the visit of the royal sons of Dasaratha to Siddhasrama, the utter destruction of the Rakshasas at their hands, their stay at Visala on the way, the release of Ahalya from her dreadful fate, their meeting with the holy Gautama, and last, their eager desire to have a sight of the rare bow in his keeping, that led them to fair Mithila. Thus did he recount to the wondering Janaka the details of their remarkable journey and paused.

CHAPTER 51.

Visvamitra's visit to Vasishtha.

The words of Visvamitra filled Satananda, the eldest son of Gautama, with supreme delight—the sainted One who shone in the splendour born of long austerities. And great was the wonder with which he gazed at Rama, the boy-hero. He turned his eyes from the princely pair seated there in calm repose and addressed himself to the happy Visvamitra.

" Mighty One! you have my thanks unbounded for kindly enabling my mother, of great renown, to bless herself with a sight of Sri Rama, for which long years of penances

and rites severe have prepared her. I have no doubt she offered due hospitality and meet worship to him whom all beings are blessed in honouring. It is a pity that she had nothing better to entertain him with, but the meagre products of the wild woods. I am sure Rama was made acquainted with the details of the unfortunate incident of yore in her life, that cruel Fate had in store for her. Verily, she has been restored to her lord and my sire, in that she has been cleansed of the foul stain that clung to her, thanks to the all-purifying presence of Sri Rama. I hope Rama here was fitly entertained by my sire and rendered back unto him due respect, with a calm heart and restrained self."

To whom replied Visvamitra, waxing eloquent over his favourite theme. "Nothing was slack, nothing went amiss; it was my care to see that everything ran smooth and to a happy conclusion. Set your heart at rest, holy sir, for, Renuka was not more happily reconciled to Jamadagni, than was Ahalya to your sainted sire."

Satananda drank in the words of the sage with delighted ears and addressing himself to Rama, spoke as follows. "Hail to thee, thou Lord of men, and glad welcome. Fortunate it was that you have been allowed to accompany the holy Visvamitra of invincible might. Wondrous deeds has he wrought through his unparalleled Tapas. Matchless he stands in glory and no mean place holds he among the Brahmarishis. Know him as the last and surest refuge from every ill. Blessed you are in all the words, for, it has been given to no other to be watched over and protected by the saintly One who stands conspicuously alone by his stern austerities. Listen to me for a space, while I try to give you a faint idea of the wondrous deeds and might of this scion of the royal race of Kausika.

The Four-faced One had a son by name Kusa . and from him were decended father and son, Kusanabha, Gadhi

and Visvamitra who stands now before us. He was a king, great and powerful and ruled over his vast empire well and wisely for thousands of years. Steadfast was he in virtue and master of all the knowledge of his time ; his heart was ever wedded to the well-being of the countless millions entrusted to his keeping.

One day he took it into his head to make a tour through his vast dominions and the lands around. At the head of his numerous and well-disciplined army, did he pass through flourishing kingdoms and stately towns, across noble rivers and over high mountains, halting at every holy spot and hermitage, until he came to where the saintly Vasishtha abode.

A lovely spot it was, a heaven on earth, Brahma's own celestial seat. Tall trees and stately spread their grateful shade around, under which grazed or played or reposed many a beast of the forest, tame and wild ; meek-eyed fawns ranged about, their natural shyness overcome by the sweet and peaceful ways of the calm-souled ascetics. Siddhas and Charanas, Devas and Danavas, Gandharvas and Kinnaras, frequented the lovely spot, while Brahmarishis, Devarishis and saintly Brahmanas made it their home. There were to be seen bands of hermits of fiery lustre who had perfected themselves in holy Tapas. Some fed on water, some on air, some lived on withered leaves, some on roots and fruits ; but all of restrained senses, of sweet manners. Valakhilyas, too, thronged the place, intent on mystic recitation and devout sacrifices , while Vaikhanasas made the holy retreat holier still

Such was the hermitage of Vasishtha and such the sight that met the wondering eyes of the mighty king.

CHAPTER 52.

Vasishtha welcomes Visvamitra.

Right glad was Visvamitra to see the best and foremost of saints, the holy Vasishtha and low bent he at his feet. "Ever welcome" exclaimed Vasishtha and desired him to take his seat. Cheerfully did he entertain his royal guest with roots and fruits and such woodland fare: which accepting, the pleased monarch made respectful enquiries. All was well with himself, his sacred fires, his disciples and his hermitage. And to the royal Visvamitra who sat at his ease, did Vasishtha address himself—the son of Brahma and the foremost of those that lead a life of holy vows and devout meditation.

"How fares it with thee, mighty lord of men? Dost thou rule over thy subjects as becomes a worthy descendant of noble kings and win their hearts with the flawless discharge of thy high duties? Seest thou that thy servants want for nothing? Do they yield ready and willing obedience unto thy commands? Do thy enemies acknowledge thy might and pay thee low homage? Is it all well with thy armies, thy revenues, thy friends, thy kith and kin"?

"Yea, Holy One, fortune favours me still" modestly replied the royal guest. The hours chased one another with winged feet, as these two, the king and the sage, discoursed on themes high and holy, with mutual delight ever increasing. The discourse came to an end all too-soon, when the reverend host with a pleased smile addressed his noble guest, "Great is my desire to offer unto thy troops and no less unto thy valiant self, the rites of hospitality, as befits thy rank and might. I pray thee to accept it of my hands and deny me not. For, art thou not my liege, my favoured guest, whom I cannot honor enough?

" That have you already done" replied Visvamitra " by your gracious speech, by the offer of such articles as your holy hermitage affords, sweet fruits, roots of the wild and crystal water to wash and drink ; and last, but not the least, thy presence, all-purifying. Honored have I been above my deserts, by the world-honored One. And now, give me kind leave to touch thy feet and depart. May I ever find favour in thy sight and a warm place in thy heart ?"

But the noble Vasishtha pressed him again and again to stay and he could not ungraciously refuse. " I obey" replied the proud son of Gadhi " I bow to thy sweet pleasure, thou Holy One".

Then did Vasishtha, the sage of matchless might, call unto him the spotted calf Nandini and say, "Haste thee hither, my sweet one and heed well, Sabala, to what I say. I have it at heart to entertain this pious king and his troops and *that* right royally. Do thou see to it that they have princely fare and sumptuous. None should desire in vain for anything ; be it meat or drink, food or viands of every kind and variety imaginable; sweet, bitter, or acrid, to taste, to sip, to quaff or to eat. No small store, mind thee, but rich abundance and over-flowing; for, man nor god cannot crave for or dream of anything, but thou can'st, in a moment, shower it upon him. This thou wilt do for my sake ; and again I say unto thee, tarry not".

CHAPTER 53.

"Give me the Cow of Plenty."

So directed by Vasishtha, Sabala, the Cow of Plenty, supplied every one with what his heart might desire, juice of the sugarcane, honey, fried rice, Maireya and such like costly liquors, delicious drinks, various kinds of cakes, heaps of hot

cooked rice, curious varieties of deliciously prepared food, soups, Dadhikulyas (rice prepared with milk) and countless plates of silver heaped up with various sweet extracts and pies of six different tastes.

The well-fed troops of Visvamitra, were, if possible, rendered more happy, and cheerful than before—such was the grand repast to which they were treated by Vasishtha. On his part, the royal sage, Visvamitra, was mightily pleased with the magnificient entertainment he received at the hands of his saintly host ; and he spoke to him out of a full heart, that well appreciated the kind attentions shown to himself, his women, his officers, his counsellors, his priests, the Brahmanas in his suite and his numerous retainers.

"Reverend Sir, right royally have I been entertained by you, the World-honored. Allow me, then, learned One, to prefer an humble request of mine. I shall consider myself highly obliged if you will give unto me this Sabala of yours and receive a hundred thousand cows in exchange. She is a gem, the best of her kind; and I need not say that with me is her lawful place ; for, know you not that the best and the rarest products of the Earth belong to the king, of right ? So give her, prithee, unto me".

To whom, his saintly host and righteous gave calm reply, "Hundreds of thousands of kine, nay, hundreds of crores of them, nor heaps of silver, shall ever induce me to part with my Sabala. Mighty monarch! She *cannot* be removed from my side; as dear fame to the high-souled man, Sabala is eternally and inseparably wedded unto me. My offerings unto the Gods and the Fathers, to the sacred Fires, morning and evening, to the various orders of Beings, visible and invisible, my oblations during the full and the new moons, my sacrifices, nay, my daily sustenance, depend solely upon her ; the milk that she gives purifies the heart

and the intellect and goes to nourish the vital currents; it endows me with perfect health and serenity and enables me to master the various arts and sciences. Doubt it not; she is all in all to me; my sole source of delight is she and perennial. These and many other reasons besides, stand in the way of my not being able to comply with your request".

This emphatic refusal of Vasishta heightened but all the more the over-mastering desire of Visvamitra to possess himself anyhow of the coveted Sabala. He waxed eloquent in his offers. "Fourteen thousands of lordly elephants with golden chains, necklets and goads; eight hundred chariots of gold, with sweet-chiming golden bells, drawn by four milk-white steeds; a thousand and ten high-bred steeds from thef ar-famed regions of Kambhoja and Bahlika, that trace their pedigree right up to Uchchaisravas and the Gandharvas; one crore of kine, young, healthy and of diverse colours; wilt thou take this and give Sabala unto me? Thou will not? Then, ask of me besides, gold and gems as much as will satisfy thy great heart, even to the utmost and it is thine. Wilt give me Sabala now?"

But Vasishtha spake stern and said "Oh, thou of matchless wisdom! know once for all that Sabala shall never be thine. She is my gems; she is my wealth; she is everything unto me; she is my very life; the new and the full moon offerings, grand sacrifices with untold gifts of wealth, nay every rite lay or religions, all these is she unto me; for, it is to her that these owe their very existence. Doubtest thou? Nay, thou hast my last word upon it—never shall I give unto thee this Granter of Desires. Everything thou offeredest me nor can dream of, can I have of her by a simple wish of mine; why, then, I must be insane to wish to part with her to thee."

CHAPTER 54.

Sabala fights.

When Visvamitra found that Vasishtha, would on no account part with the 'Cow of Plenty,' he began to drag her away by main force. Whereat, Sabala, sad at heart and burning with grief, said to herself, "What? Has the noble Vasishtha forsaken me quite? Has he delivered me over, sorrow-stricken and afflicted, to the king's attendants to be dragged away? Never have I offended the lofty-minded sage, in thought, in word or indeed; why, then, does he cast me off, innocent, faithful and dear to him—and he the soul of virtue and justice?"

So she thought, while deep sighs shook her frame. All at once she made up her mind and shaking off the menial crowd that laid violent hands on her, as if they were but feathers light, she rushed past them, swifter than wind, on to where her master stood. With sobs and moans, grievous to hear, did she appeal to the saintly Vasishtha; and in tones loud and majestic as of rolling clouds or war-drums huge, spake she forth her tale of woe. "Child of Brahma? Lord! the king's servants drag me away by main force from your side. Is it that you have cast me off?"

To which the saintly One gave sad reply. Convulsed with grief, she stood before him and his own heart was wrung with pity to see her suffering so, dearer to him than a sister. "Know you not, Sabala, that I can never bear to have you away from me even in thought? Know you not that you can never give me any offence, nay, the slightest? I deliver you over into the hands of strangers! Nay, it is but yon king that takes you from me, by main force, against my will. A mighty monarch is he and immeasurably proud of his might. I am no match for him, for, is he not a great warrior, a mighty king? He traces his line through ances-

tors famed for strength of arm and valor of heart; and above all, he is lord and master of wide lands—with untold millions to do his behests. Lo! yonder stands his dread hosts, embattled in fierce array and countless as the sands of the ocean—chariots, horses, elephants and infantry,—beneath proud banners and pennons gay. Now, see you not that he is mightier than I?"

Sabala heard him out and in all humility rendered answer to the wise One. "Lord! It needs no saying from me that a warrior's strength and might is as nought before the radiant energy of a Brahmana; for, it is not of the earth; divine in its nature, it has its source from on high. Again I say unto you, a Kshatrya is as chaff before a strong gale, when he pits himself against a Brahmana. Know I not your potent might, that it is utterly immeasurable, inconceivable? Visvamitra is a warrior bold, it is true but, what is he before your awful might, before your all-consuming energy. O thou of radiant glory! speak the word and I, in whom is stored up that terrible Brahmic energy of thine, will, before the eye has time to wink, reduce to ashes yonder vast host that feeds his overweening pride."

"Be it so. Bring forth, of thy might, armies that shall scatter to the winds the proud hosts of the king."

No sooner did his words go forth, than Sabala uttered an awful "Humph"; and close upon it came into view vast hordes of Paplavas, hundreds and thousands of them, and spread dire ruin and confusion among the ranks of the enemy, right before the eyes of the wondering Visvamitra.

But, soon he recovered himself; and roused to fury at the sight of his splendid army thus cruelly wrecked, he rushed forth upon them in his chariot of gold and with bloodshot eyes of anger, rained arrows and weapons, great and small, upon the opposing Paplavas, till they were laid low, every one of them.

Sabala, observing the sad plight of her warrior brood, brought forth in her wrath, fierce Sakas, Yavanas and Kambhojas. Of superhuman strength and valour and fair as the lovely petals of the bright Champaka, they marched forth in dread array against the foe, while their long swords and gold attire gave back a thousandfold the rays of the sun. They hid the earth from view, so numerous were they; and whereever they fell, the all consuming fire was not crueller. Which perceiving, Visvamitra, in sore straits, hurled upon them his weapons of magical might, until the Yavanas, the Kambhojas, the Paplavas and the Sakas were scattered to the winds.

CHAPTER 55.

Vasishtha and Visvamitra.

Hard pressed by the Astras of Visvamitra, the warriors brought into existence by the magic might of Sabala stood in sore dismay. Whereat Vasishtha turned to the Cow of Plenty and cried, "O thou of infinite potency to create! bring forth fresh troops through thy Yogic power inherent". At his word Sabala gave forth a mighty grunt and lo! there stood before her, hosts of Kambhojas radiant as the sun; from her udders sprang forth Paplavas,—ready armed for fray. Yavanas from her organs of generation; Sakas from her organs of excretion, and from every pore on her body rushed forth countless hordes of Mlechchas, Haritas, Kiratas; and soon, nought remained of the vast armies of Visvamitra, horses, nor chariots, elephants nor soldiers.

The sight stung to fury the hundred sons of the ruler of men and they fell, in a body, upon the solitary Vasishtha, that master of dread spells. "Hum" cried he and there they lay, a heap of ashes, before one can say lo! They who stood forth a moment ago in the pride of power and the prime o

strength, girt by countless bands of warriors, cavalry and chariots. Thus perished the fated sons of the monarch.

And he, their father, a prey to impotent rage, gnawing shame and sore grief of heart. The mighty ocean stilled of its mountain waves by some potent word of power; a serpent huge, of her deadly fangs bereft; the resplendent Orb of Day in the merciless grasp of the eclipse, her blinding lustre suddenly quenched; or a swift coursing bird shorn of its wings, was not more miserable than Visvamitra, the king, his pride broken, his energy lost and overwhelming grief heavy at his heart, his dear sons and proud army done to destruction before his very eyes and *he* powerless to lift a finger in their defence. But, he resolved to live, if it be to wreak vangeance dire upon his proud foe; and placing a son of his on the throne, he bade him rule well and wisely, laying to his heart the traditions of his famed ancestors and took his way to the dark slopes of the Himalayas, where Kinnaras fair and Uragas ever love to dwell. By dread austerities and stern vows he sought to propitiate Mahadeva. Long years passed over his head, till one happy day the Lord of Kailasa stood before him on his mighty Bull, gracious of mood and most bountiful.

"These penances severe, why, Lord of men? Speak thou thy wish and thou shalt have it; for I am the Giver of Boons and thou hast found favour with me. Speak and hesitate not." Visvamitra bowed himself low in humble reverence before the Radiant Presence and prayed in accents meek. "If it be true that my Lord is pleased with his servant, I crave to be initiated in the science of war in all its branches, down to the minutest details. Reveal unto me its innermost secrets, its potent spells unknown to others. Grant Thou unto me perfect mastery over the magic weapons of the Devas, the Asuras, the Gandharvas, the Yakshas, and the Rakshasas, sages mighty and heroes brave, in the worlds

above or the regions below. All these and more through Thy illimitable grace be mine, whatever I desire." "So be it" assented Mahadeva and vanished from view. And the proud Visvamitra of matchless valour, happy in the possession of mighty wepons human and divine, grew prouder yet scarce could he contain his swelling energy that grew and grew even as the billowy deep under the stimulating rays of the full moon. The feeble Vasishtha was to him already dead and destroyed or so he thought.

Straight upon the calm solitudes of the peaceful hermitage did he advance and let loose the fires of his wrathful vengeance in weapons of dire might, until a lonely waste was all that remained of the once lovely spot. Its saintly dwellers fled away in affright when the irate king levelled his magic shafts at their calm retreat. Hundreds and thousands of them scattered themselves all over the land, glad to escape the general destruction ; and after them, their numerous disciples—nay, the very beasts of the forest and the fowls of the air followed them in hot haste. A moment ago it was a lovely scene of peace, innocence, gaiety, and calm meditation ; but now—a lonely waste, over which the silence of death hung black and oppressive.

But, Vasishtha, shaken at last out of his philosophical indifference, cried out time and oft, "Fear not, my friends ; him will I annihilate all to nothing, this proud son of Gadhi, even as the morning sun dispels the filmy dews of the night." Then that Master of magic potent, turned to the proud Visvamitra and hissed forth these dread words like winged flame. "Wretched fool! that laid waste this fair hermitage of mine, the shelter and refuge of many an innocent thing, of many a noble sage, thy cup of iniquity is full and overflowing. Thy hour has come."

He spake and scarce unable to contain his rising wrath, held aloft his magic wand, terrible as the smokeless Fire of Dissolution or as the fearful Rod of Death.

CHAPTER 56.

Brahmana *versus* Kshatriya.

It required but a spark to kindle the smouldering ire of Visvamitra and madly did he rush at his saintly host. "Stay, stay, thou braggart ! Darest thou to beard the lion in his den and Visvamitra among his troops ? And hopest thou hence unscathed to flee ? ". And he hurled at him the flaming weapon of the God of Fire.

But, Vasishtha, now roused to a pitch of fury at this unwonted return of gratitude, raised aloft his Brahmana staff not unlike the Rod of Death and cried, "Vile wretch of a Kshatriya ! I flee not. Here do I stay to give you a chance to parade your strength, your might and your brand-new weapons. Son of Gadhi ! mark my words. Your haughty spirit shall I quell and not lightly ; and your supreme conceit in the magical weapons you have come by. Pah ! your warrior energy ! It is as the morning mist before the burning rays of the Brahmana might. Fie upon you ! you standing disgrace to thy noble ancestors ! you *will* show off your child's toys before me, will you ? Well, you shall have a taste of my Brahmana might, divine in its nature, mind you".

He spoke and lo ! the rushing Weapon of the Fire God, terrible to behold, was quenched out of existence, even as a stream of cold water puts out a blazing fire.

Speechless with rage and grief, Visvamitra sped against Vasishtha, that mighty Master of Spells, a continuous stream of magic weapons—the dread darts of Varuna, Rudra, Indra and Pasupati ; the Aishika, the Manava, the Mohana, the Gandharva, the Swapana, the Jrimbhana, the Madana, the Santapana, the Vilapana, the Soshana, Darana ; the invincible Vajra ; the noose of Brahma, of Yama and of Varuna ; the

Pinakastra, dear to Siva ; two bolts, the wet and the dry ; the Dandastra, the Paisachastra, and the Kraunchastra ; the Dharmachakra, Kalachakra Vishnuchakra ; Vayavyastra, Mathanastra, Hayasiras ; two Saktis ; Kankala, Musala, Vidyadharastra, Kalastra, Trisula, Kapala, Kankana. All these and many more did he send forth against the serene Vasishtha ; and indeed it was wonderful to behold, the saintly son of Brahma swallowing them one after another, with but his dread Rod.

Thereafter, when his newly stocked armoury of magic weapons was exhausted, did the royal Visvamitra hold aloft the terrible Brahmastra and hurl it at his invincible foe. The God of Fire and his Fellows, the divine sages, the Gandharvas, the Uragas, and nay, the three worlds, trembled in sore affright and confusion, when they beheld the terrible Brahmastra speeding on its course towards Vasishtha. But he, the sage of restrained self and stern vows, stirred not, nor lifted a finger to ward it off ; for, his mighty Brahmana Staff, charged with the immeasurable energy engendered of untold ages of meditation on the Supreme, absorbed it quite into itself and nought was left of it. Terrible to see was Vasishtha, the mighty One, when he drew into himself that most powerful of weapons; and all creation stood in dismay thereat. Fearful to conceive was the supernatural brilliance of his form as the intaken energy poured itself out in flashing streams of blinding light, even as tiny sparks from a blazing fire. And his staff was enveloped in sheets of flame, like unto the smokeless Fire of Destruction or the Rod of Time.

Then, the sages on high bent over their clasped hands and prayed in tones of humble entreaty. " Dread Master of Enchantments ! inconceivable is thy might and invincible ; quench thou his all-consuming fire by thy supreme energy. Visvamitra, of mighty Tapas though, has

been humbled by thee, and no mistake. Be gracious unto us, thou Master of Magic Potent and give peace and rest unto the trembling worlds."

But, Visvamitra, sore stricken, sighed in impotent rage and baffled might, as if his heart would break. "Fie upon the puny warrior might! The Brahman energy, ah!, that is something to pray for and toil after. What! all my hard-won arms of terrible power baffled by that single staff in the hand of a Brahmana! Now that I have convincing proof enough, I shall uproot love and anger from my heart and with a calm self and serene, set myself upon the path that leads to the coveted eminence of a Brahmana."

CHAPTER 57.

Trisanku.

Visvamitra, out of the great conceit that filled his heart, sought enmity with the all-powerful Vasishtha and fastened a quarrel upon him; and he was amply rewarded for his pains. The memory of his defeat was burnt into his heart in letters of fire and hot sighs broke from it, as fierce flames from the bowels of the earth.

He betook himself to the south and his wife along with him and there, in the dark solitudes of the forest, did he carry on a course of stern Tapas, wild roots and fruits his only food and his rebellious senses well under restraint. And to him were born sons of righteous lives and straight speech, Havishyanda, Madhushyanda, Dridhanetra and others.

A thousand years passed over his head and at the end of it, Brahma, the Grandsire of the Worlds, stood before him and in accents sweet and mild, addressed the royal ascetic, "Son of Gadhi! thy Tapas has won for thee the

bright regions of the Rajarshis: for, now thou holdest the proud rank of a Rajarshi." He spoke and went back to his glorious seat on high and the attendant Gods along with him.

But, Visvamitra hung his head in sore grief and shame: "A noble return" said he to himself in tones of bitter despondence, "for the dread austerities and stern discipline I passed through. A Rajarshi am I, is it? So said the Great One and the Gods and the sages confirmed it. I have toiled hard and to no purpose." So, with an undaunted heart and never-flagging energy, did he resume his efforts.

It was about this time there ruled at Ayodhya, a king, by name Trisanku, of the royal line of Ikshwaku. A man of truthful speech was he and self-controlled to a degree: and to him there came a desire to sacrifice to the bright Gods and win a seat in the mansions of the Blessed: and that in the very body he had when on earth. He called unto him Vasishtha, the high-priest of the Ikshwakus and humbly submitted his prayer to him.

"Impossible;" cried the Holy One, "not that I am unable to conduct such a rite; nor that such a thing is impossible; for, do not the Holy Scriptures say, 'He attains the bright Worlds of the Gods, and, that in his body of flesh'; but I have looked into the records of your past lives and see I there nothing to ensure the probability of success. Desist from the rash resolve, I lay my orders upon you."

Foiled in the dearest wish of his heart, Trisanku took his way to the south, even where the numerous sons of Vasishtha were engaged in holy Tapas. A glorious sight they presented to the king in their radiant forms of mighty energy latent. The royal petitioner approached them in humble guise, the far-famed sages and laid his proud head

at their holy feet: he stood up before them and bending low over his joined palms, addressed them in pitiful accents, albeit a sense of insulted majesty unconsciously stooped his haughty head. "I take my refuge in you, noble ones; you are the last and the sole refuge of the helpless. The high-souled Vasishtha has refused me, though I prayed ever so humbly. All glory be unto you. Great is my longing that you perform for me a sacrifice which shall unable me to ascend to the bright Swarga in this present body of mine. Behold I lay my head at your feet in humble entreaty and pray you all, the sons of my Guru, to enable me to realise the desire of my heart. And not less you, holy Brahmanas! whose whole life is one long prayer and meditation. Bless me out of your noble hearts and assist at this sacrifice on which rest my hopes here and hereafter. Sternly refused by Vasishtha, I see no haven of safety but in the sons of my reverend Master. For, know I not that to the Ikshwakus their high-priest is their God, their surest stay and support? It has ever been a sacred truth that the high-priest, th Fountain of Power and Wisdom is the shield and the spea of the Kings. And after them, stand you, holy Brahmana as my guardian Angels."

CHAPTER 58.

The Royal Chandala.

To which lowly request of the royal Trisanku the sons of Vasishtha gave quick reply, winged with wrath. "Evil-minded man! rejected hast thou been by our Lord Vasishtha, who speaks true; and darest thou seek any other, passing by so lightly the dread son of Brahma? The royal Ikshwakus, every one of them, know no other master than their High-priest. And his word once gone forth, the Truth-speaker, they dare not say it nay. The sacrifice he has pronounced

impossible in your case, dare we dream of it? A boy thou art, nay, but a child, though many winters have passed over thy head and blind fortune has made thee king. Seek thou thy home, even as thou came. The Lord Vasishtha alone has the right and the might to conduct any sacrifice, be it to gain the bright spheres above or the dull globes below. And who are we to dare insult his majesty by offering to set about a thing he has once declared impossible?"

But, the king, nothing daunted by the words of winged flame from the lips of his master's sons, spoke in humbler accents still, "Denied have I been by my master Vasishtha and no better treatment have I received at the hands of his sons; what how remains for me but to seek another protector, since you would drive me to it? All good be yours, wealthy beyond count in your holy meditations."

The sons of Vasishtha could not believe their senses. Vhat! a member of the house of Ikshwaku cutting himself ay the spiritual ties that bound him, strong as the bands Fate, to his High-priest, the Lord Vasishtha, the mind-rn son of Brahma, eternally wedded unto the royal house, her and son! and seeking the feet of another, even in ought! What madness thus to lay the axe at the root of his ouse! How utterly black and horrible should be the heart of such a monster! In a fit of uncontrollable fury, they cursed him in words of withering flame. "Wretch! Quit thou that form of Kshatriya and take thou the degraded shape of a Chandala". They spoke and entered their holy abodes, as if to avoid the foul sight of the traitor.

The rosy fingers of Morn drew aside with a deft touch the dark curtains around the bed of the sleeping world as Trisanku, the king of radiant presence, found himself transformed into a vile Chandala. Not a semblance of one, in heart or in nature, but the *very* thing itself. For, each

grade of society is based on the rigid and unswerving discharge of the duties eternally attached thereunto ; and once that a member fails in it, nay, in the slightest, he becomes what he has made himself, consciously and voluntarily. His bright robes flashing with gold and gems, were changed to the dirty black rags of the outcast. The stately form of golden hue, now took on a hideous tint, dark as guilt and more repulsive. His once shining locks, now a tangled mass of wool, short and coarse. Of for-bidding aspect, his shoulders were graced with garlands of flowers that erstwhile lay on the corpses in the crematorium. The ashes of the dead covered his limbs and took the place of the delicate-scented sandal paste and the rare perfumes. An unsightly strip of leather, lay on the broad and massive chest, where once gleamed the Sacred Thread of gold, the badge of the Twice-born. And curious ornaments of black iron but added to the horror of the degradation. His ministers and councellors fled away in affright from him, the outcast Chandala ; and the loya citizens followed at their heels. But, he, the proud monarc a day before, wended his weary way all alone. The cru talons of Shame and Anger dug at the root of his heart but Titan-like, undaunted yet he stood and unconquerabl Visvamitra was the man he approached ; Visvamitra, the deadliest foe of Vasishtha, who had said him nay, whose sons had launched their terrible curse upon him ; even Visvamitra of fiery will and terrible energy.

Visvamitra cast his eyes on the proud scion of the royal race of Ikshwaku, whose hopes here and hereafter were shattered to nothing by his mortal enemy Vasishtha and his sons. Grievour pity filled his heart to see the Ruler of men approaching him in the despised guise of a Chandala; and out of that great pity did the righteous sage of dazzling lustre address the Lord of Ayodhya, now no gentle sight. "Hail to thee ! and all good. What brings thee here ? The

son of a king thou, of invincible might, hast thou fallen on evil days? Ruler of the stately Ayodhya! How hast thou come to be cursed to become a Chandala."

To which kind enquiry of his brother monarch, did Trisanku, Chandala against his will, render meek reply. "Spurned have I been" cried he over his folded palms, "by my Guru Vasishtha and his sons. What I sought them for I have not got; but, what I never bargained for, what I could never deserve, nay, what I would flee away from, that, have I received at their hands and in no small measure. Strong is the desire of my heart to ascend to the homes of the Shining Ones, in this mortal frame of mine. Sacrifices innumberable have I performed, but I am no whit nearer the realization of my hopes. Nor have I given utterance to an untruth, nor will hereafter. So, I cannot, for a moment, believe that any breach of truth on my part has nullified the effects of my sacrifices. I am now in the coils of Adversity; but I swear to you on the honour of a Kshatriya that I speak the bare truth. Never have I failed in the regular and conscientious discharge of my daily duties—sacrifices to the Gods, to the Fathers, and to the various orders of Beings; just and wise government of my people; humble service to my spiritual guides and other high-souled Ones, meet and acceptable. Ever do I seek to walk in the straight and narrow path of Right and Duty: but my teachers look not with favour upon me when I prayed them to conduct for me a rite to gain me a seat among the Gods. Verily do I think that Fate has the last word in our affairs and free will and individual effort are but as light grains of dust before it. Fate rules supreme over everything. Fate is the sole and last Arbitrer of joy and sorrow, good and bad. It behoves you to stretch out to me the hand of help, a wretch whom the Wheel of Fortune has flung lower than the lowest and whose turn

he awaits with an eager heart. May your glory never grow less. Cruel Fate inexorble has pierced my shield, shattered my spear and beat me down to my very knees. I have reached the end of my resources ; I throw myself on your limitless compassion and pray to sit under the shadow of your might. No other Protector shall I seek, for Protector have I none. To your holy feet do I cling and will not quit them even though the mighty Vasishtha should pray it of me to go back unto him. Utmost confidence have I, nay, it is a certainty with me that you and you alone can, if you will, lightly set aside strong Fate and make it powerless."

CHAPTER 59.

Visvamitra Champions Trisanku.

Whereupon, unto the noble king, condemned by a frightful doom to drag out his miserable existence as a vile outcast, Visvamitra replied in words of liquid melody that welled from a heart overflowing with pity. "Welcome, proud member of a noble race! you are not, my son, unknown to me as an exceedingly righteous king and pious. Fear not, noble lord! for from this moment you sit under the shadow of my shield and my sword is at the breast of your enemies. I will lose no time in sending for such as can help me in this sacrifice of mine, wise sages and saintly ascetics. And one they are here, you will, with a heart relieved of care, be enabled to begin it. Born Chandala you are not. were it so, this curse, pronounced by your Guru, would be hard for the Self-born One to set aside. So, shall you in this body of thine ascend to the bright heavens, and all through the power of my Tapas. I see the gates of heaven open wide to welcome their honoured guest: methinks I see you take your proud seat among the Gods; for have you not

asked for and obtained refuge with Visvamitra, son of Gadhi, the Champion of the Weak and the Oppressed?"

He spake, the proud sage of matchless glory and directed his sons righteous and wise, to get everything ready towards the sacrifice. Next he sent for his disciples and said to them, "Speed ye far and near and invite hither the Wise Ones of the Earth, their pupils, their friends, as also the sacrificial priests and those who have drunk deep of the words of Wisdom. If any but breathe a word of dissent, nay, so much as dare slight me, saying, 'Lo! here is a Kshatriya has taken it upon himself to sacrifice for a Chandala, you will not omit to bring it to my ears."

They heard and obeyed his behests. On the wings of speed they flew and brought him back word of what transpired. "Lord of dazzling lustre!" cried the students of the Sacred Lore, "the wise sages of the earth, everyone of them, have heard thy message and are even now on their way here, all except Mahodaya and the sons of Vasishtha. Nay, dread Lord, the latter had the matchless impudence to say in tones of concentrated wrath, 'Strange days are come over us and strange things happen. Wonder of wonders! A Kshatriya has the audacity to assume the sacred functions of a sacrificial priest and *that* for a degraded Chandala! Have the noble Brahmanas become so scarce that a warrior should pose himself as such? Have the Twice-born disappeared, from the bosom of the earth, that a Chandala should dare to allow a sacrifice to be conducted for his benefit? A nice pair this, a fighting priest, and the outcast sacrificer! A strange sight will it be to see the holy sages and the radiant Gods sit down in the hall, to partake of the offerings! And the high-souled Brahmanas, how do they hope to ascend to the mansions of the Shining Ones, defiled beyond hope by having partaken of food at the hands of the Chandala? And the

sages of the holy vows, how dare they have assisted at the celebration of such a sacrilegeous rite, though they have the mighty Visvamitra to back them'. Such were the words of wanton insult uttered by Mahodaya and the numerous sons of Vasishtha, their eyes flashing fire."

Visvamitra heard them and fierce flames shot out of his eyes; while the burning wrath in his heart found vent in words of doom. "And so, the impious wretches dared to say this about me, pure and spotless, engaged in dread austerities. Well, they may decry me, for they know not that nothing can stand before the all-consuming energy of my Tapas, nay, not even the so-called sacrilege of sacrificing for a Chandala. Well, here is the reward for their pains. Nothing shall remain of them but a heap of ashes. Fell Time shall cast his noose over their necks and hale them even to the gates of the Lord of Death; and that this very moment. Nay, more is yet to come; for, my anger shall pursue them even beyond the portals of Life and Death. For lives seven hundred, shall they drag on a miserable existence, foul eaters of the decaying corpse and dogs' meat. Pitiless of heart, they shall go under the name of Mushtikas and shall range the worlds, uncouth of form, speech and habits. As for Mahodaya, who, in his mad folly reviled me, the stainless, he shall, of a truth, be a degraded Nishada. Ever intent upon murder and violence, with a heart knowing no shadow of pity, he shall, for ages untold, suffer a life of misery and my anger shall chain him thereto."

So spake Visvamitra, the sage of stern vows, while calm-souled ascetics heard him with well-concealed expressions of sorrow and disapproval.

CHAPTER 60.

The Triumph of Visvamitra.

Having thus annihilated, by the might of his Tapas, Mahodaya and the sons of Vasishtha, Visvamitra turned to the assembled sages and said "Behold this scion of the royal race of Ikshwaku, known to men as Trisanku. Firm are his feet on the path of Righteousness and he is a great Giver of gifts ; above all, he has sought refuge with me. For, great is his desire to ascend to the worlds of the Gods in his body of flesh. You and I will so conduct a sacrifice for him that he may go away from amongst us, his heart yearnings gratified to the full."

The sages heard him out and took council among themselves. "This our host, the sage Visvamitra, the proud descendant of the Kusikas, is a very Fountain of Wrath. We must do even as he says . else he will verily consume us with his curses. Far be it from us, then, to do anything that might draw his lightning upon us. Now, let us lose no time in commencing the sacrifice, which shall, thanks to the immeasurable might of Visvamitra, raise Trisanku aloft to the seat of the Gods, even in his earthly body. Betake we each to our respective duties."

And so the long-delayed sacrifice commenced, under no very favourable auspices, Visvamitra assuming himself the responsible post of the Adhwaryu, while his brother sages went about their duties without a fault, without a hitch, as ordained by the Book of Rules.

Then, in due course, did Visvamitra of dread puissance, call upon the Shining Ones to come down to the sacrifice and receive their shares of the offerings—Once, twice, thrice. But, the Lords of Light came not, though invoked time and oft. "What sacrifice is this, in which a *Kshatriya*, all

unqualified, sacrifices for a wretch, cursed by the Lord Vasishtha to be a foul Chandala : and shall we, even respond to the unholy call and defile ourselves for all time, by partaking of the offerings therein ?"

A storm of wrath shook the proud frame of Visvamitra ; and raising aloft the sacrificial ladle, did he cry in a terrible voice, "Trisanku ! my son, let be this rite on which you rest your hopes. Behold what my hard-earned Tapas can do. I shall, out of my innate energy, raise you to the skies, even where the haughty Gods have their abode, and that in this very body you now wear. No easy task for others, see you. There yet remains to me unexpended some of the might which I have acquired by long austerities, stern and holy ; and by the force of *that*, ascend, Trisanku, to the bright homes of the Angels of Light in this very body of yours."

No sooner were the words out of his mouth, than the sages assembled beheld a wonderful sight, nay a miracle, and Trisanku rose aloft from this dull Earth right up towords the radiant worlds of the Celestials, in the dark and degraded form of the Chandala.

But, Indra, the Lord of the Immortals, saw him, the unworthy one, advancing to take his place among them ; and voicing the unspoken resolve of the Gods, " Back, back, Trisanku," cried he " sooner than you came. *You* have no place here among us. Fool that you are ! see you not the black curse of your Guru dragging you down ? Fall thou headlong upon the patient bosom of Mother Earth, who groans beneath the weight of your sin." And Trisanku, hurled head downwards from the High Heavens, cried out in heart-rending tones of agonised entreaty, " Save me, Oh save me, my Lord Visvamitra, my only saviour."

The cry pierced him to the heart and roused him to a pitch of ungovernable fury. " Stay where thou art ; stay,

I command thee " cried he. And Trisanku stood in mid-air as if petrified.

Then, seated as he was in the midst of his fellow-sages, did he, like another Brahma, proceed to evolve a new creation. " Lo ! my Trisanku shall be the Pole-star of my new system. Another constellation of the Seven Rishis (Ursa Major), shall revolve around him : and beyond these, another circle of lunar asterisms." He spoke ; and in the south, there rose a grand system of worlds, the counterpart of that in the north. But his rage would not stop there and he continued. "My new world, it shall have another Indra over it : but, stay, methinks it were better without one (the very name is hateful to me). Why, Trisanku, my son, shall be its Lord,--and shall outshine that wretch of an Indra who dared to stand against my will." And forthwith, he set about to fashion another creation of the various Celestial Hierarchies.

Then, mighty fear seized the hearts of the Gods, the Asuras, and the sages at this undreamt of and awful display of power, almost divine · and with humble entreaties and low, they approached the irate sage, at their wits' end almost, how to accomplish the hopeless task of charming his wounded pride with words. "Mighty One ! This king, your protege, is not entitled to a place among us. Our bright worlds are for such of the Twice-born as are unsullied and pure : whereas, Trisanku, holy as he is, lives under the inexorable curse of his Guru, the all-powerful Vasishtha. And who knows it better than you ?"

Now, Visvamitra's heart was glad and his anger pacified some-what . for, were not the proud Gods at his feet, who, a little while ago, had the temerity to brave his anger and would not come when called ? But, his iron will would not yield, nay, not so much as a hair-breadth. " Peace be unto you !" cried he, (and this was the only sign he gave of any reconciliation towards his haughty foes,) "my word has passed to Trisanku

the king here, that he *shall*, in this body *of* his ascend to your worlds; and it shall never prove otherwise. Since you *will* not receive him of your own accord, I have no other god than make my word good anyhow, by methods not very pleasant to you. Where Trisanku now is, there shall be a world of the Gods: and the stars and constellations-created by me, as also the orders of Heavenly Powers, shall continue to exist, to the day of the Great Dissolution. May I hope that you will accord, out of your pleasure, your consent to this arrangement, to which perforce I am driven by dire necessity?"

What could they do, the Gods, foiled by the terrible might of Visvamitra? They made the best of a bad bargain and gave in with a good grace. "It shall be even as you desire. Your stars, your constellations and the various orders of Celestial Beings, shall endure for ever, even as the existing solar system, but outside the Vaisvanara path (the Zodiac). These shall ever revolve round the fortunate Trisanku, radiant as the Gods and as happy as they—but he shall hang head downwards, as a living reminder of the awful sacrilege of setting aside the words of the spiritual teacher. In other respects his fame shall illuminate all the worlds, as falls to the lot of no mortal."

"Be it so," Visvamitra gave glad assent, while the Gods and the sages assembled, lauded to the skies the righteous sage of superhuman power.

The sacrifice was completed; (Visvamitra placed another person in Trisanku's stead;—and *this time*, the Gods failed not to come down and partake of the offerings); the Shining Ones and the sages of high spiritual fervour departed to their respective abodes, well-pleased.

CHAPTER 61.

Ambarisha.

Visvamitra saw them depart, the holy sages and addressed himself to the dwellers of that forest. "The southern quarter where now we are is not favourable to our purpose; let us proceed to the west and continue our Tapas there; for, a mighty check has been placed upon us here. The forests of Pushkara will, I am sure, prove more congenial to our quest; for, as a holy spot it has no equal." So he repaired to the groves of Pushkara and resumed his severe austerities, supporting himself solely upon fruits and roots.

It was about this time that Ambarisha, the ruler of Ayodhya, set about to perform a grand sacrificial rite, during which Indra made away with the consecrated horse. The high priest turned to the king and said. "Lost is the consecrated animal and all through your carelessness. Heedless acts such as these never fail to bring ruin on the head of the ruler who fails to protect his charge. But, the mistake can be repaired if you can bring back the animal or a man to take its place. Delay not, but see that you do it before the sacrifice is over."

With a heavy heart did Ambarisha seek far and wide and offered thousands of kine to any one who would give him a man to sacrifice. Towns and cities, hamlets and groves, forests and peaceful hermitages and distant lands, he omitted none. But vain was his quest, until at last he came to Bhrigutunda, where lived, in his calm retreat, Richika, with his wife and sons. Him the royal sage approached, of boundless glory and reverence paid, proferred his request to the pleased Maharishi, radiant in the might of his Tapas. "Hail to thee, Holy One! is it well with thee and thy peaceful round of religious duties? Come

hither have I, to beg of you one of your sons for a sacrificial offering ; thousands of kine shall be thine if thou but fulfil my purpose and bring peace to my tortured heart. Far have I roamed and humbly sought for anyone who would consent to furnish me with a sacrificial victim, and my last hope rests in thee. Take whatever price thou wilt, but give me one of thy sons." And to him replied the sage of radiant presence, " Never shall I part with my first-born, no, not for any consideration."

Then spoke to the king the mother of the boys. " My lord of the line of Bhrigu has passed his word that the eldest son of his loins shall never be sold to another ; but, ruler of countless millions ! dearer unto me is my youngest, Sunaka so named. Him shall I never consent to give away, for, know you not that a father's hopes are ever centered in his eldest boy, while the youngest born twines himself round the heart of her that gave him birth ? Now, do you blame me for standing between death and him whom I have best ?"

Sunassepha, the mid-most of the three, listened to the words of his parents and with a firm heart said to the king, " He that came unto the world before me is dear unto my saintly father ; he who saw the light after me is no less so unto my mother. Sold they shall not be, my parents would have it so. Then, it goes without saying that, he who remains is welcome to be taken by thee. Lead me, O, king ! where thou wilt."

Sunassepha, of matchless wisdom having thus sold himself unto the king, Ambarisha, his heart dancing with joy, loaded the sage with rich gifts and costly, silver and gold, gems and precious stones of countless value and hundreds of thousands of cattle. He took respectfully leave of the saintly pair and placing the hard-won Sunassepha

on his royal car, wended his way back to where stands the lordly Ayodhya.

CHAPTER 62.

VISVAMITRA SAVES SUNASSEPHA.

It was the height of noon when the monarch unyoked his weary steeds to take a short rest on the banks of lake Pushkara.

But, Sunassepha, wandering aimlessly over the place with a heavy heart, chanced to come upon Visvamitra, his mother's brother, engaged with many a hermit in stern austerities. Faint with toil and thirst, he ran up with a woeful countenance to where sat Visvamitra and falling upon his breast, cried to him in pitious accents.

" Father have I none, nor fondling mother nor kith nor kin. Thou art my refuge and stay and thee do I call upon in the name of sweet compassion to save me from this dreadful fate. Thou art ever the champion of the oppressed: thou art ever a shield between the wretched and their misery, Find thou a way by which the king shall achieve his object and myself spend long years of holy austerities on this earth and win the abode of the Gods at the end. Protect me, for protector have I none, out of thy tender heart and sweet pity ; be thou a father unto me and chase away this horrible danger that hangs over my head".

Visvamitra, of boundless might, calmed the wild grief of the boy and infused hope into his despairing heart. Turning to his sons, " Now is the time come" said he " for you to show that a father brings forth from his loins sons like unto himself, to secure him good on earth and lead him to the bright regions on high. This boy whom you see here, the

son of a hermit, clasps my feet in humble appeal for protection. Save his life and bring joy and peace unto his broken heart. Everyone of you has kept the observances, not one of you that has ever swerved from the path of Right and Duty. Take you his place at the sacrifice of Ambarisha and may the bright God of Fire find in you a sweet offering. Sunassepha shall be saved from death ; the sacrifice shall come to a happy end : the gods shall depart well pleased ; and my word to the orphan-boy shall have been well kept."

Loud laughed they in scorn, his sons, Madhusyanda and the rest ; and spoke back unto their father out of a proud heart and haughty spirit. "A fine father it is, that puts a stranger's brat before his own flesh and blood. The very idea is repulsive to us, even as dog's meat for dinner."

Fire flashed from the eyes of the angry father and in a terrible voice he cried out. "Dare ye speak to me such words as these, heartless, blood-curdling, shameless. Dare ye set my commands at defiance and outrage Duty and Justice. Wanderers over the earth shall ye be, everyone, for a thousand years, your only food the dog's meat you so abhorred, even as the sons of my hated rival Vasishtha." So cursed he in mighty wrath his sons rebellious ; and turning himself to the despairing Sunassepha, he performed certain protective rites to ensure his safety at the dreadful moment. "Fair son, when to the sacrificial stake of Vishnu bound, a helpless victim you stand, fail not to call upon the bright God of Fire in that hour of heed. Two spells I give you, of potent might, with which you shall win the grace of Indra and Vishnu. When the bands of holy grass are tight around you, the red sandal paste on your limbs and the blood red garland round your doomed neck, chant you these hymns of unspeakable power in the sacrificial hall of the royal Ambarisha and you will come by no harm."

Sunassepha humbly received the potent charms and with a joyful heart hastened to his royal master and said, "Mighty king, we have tarried too long on the way. Proceed we to the place of sacrifice and delay not to take upon yourself the initiatory vow."

Soon they were at Ayodhya; and Ambarisha, now all joy, caused Sunassepha, the voluntary victim, to be bound to the sacrificial stake; the withes of the sacred Kusa encircled his graceful limbs; and his garments of fiery red but enhanced the horror of the scene. The holy priests directed him therein and saw that nothing went amiss. The supreme moment came that was to decide his fate; when, lo! there rung forth, from the helpless victim bound, words of wondrous might, praising high the great Indra and his greater brother Vishnu; and it was even as his wise master had taught him. The thousand-eyed Lord was surprised and pleased; for, the mysterious words of praise were known to no sons of earth. Long years of happy life were the meed of him that won the heart of the Lord of the Angels. Ambarisha too came in for his share of the hard-won grace of the mighty One, in that the high merit of the holy rite was his, a thousandfold increased thereby.

All the while, Visvamitra, the Heaven-sent protector of the orphan-boy, went on with his stern Tapas at the holy Pushkara and mortal years twice five hundred did he count.

CHAPTER 63.

Visvamitra and the Siren.

It was over, the long and severe Tapas, and unto Visvamitra, fresh from his bath, came the Immortals, every one of them, desirous that he should reap the fruits of his long and arduous labours. Then spake the Four faced One, his

divine glory brightening the bright space around, "Hail to thee !" so rang the accents sweet, "A Rishi art thou and right well dost thou deserve the rank thy holy Tapas has gained for thee"; and with that he went back to his bright world. But Visvamitra's heart was heavy yet and he resumed his untiring labours.

The long years passed over his patient head and one fine day an Apsaras, Menaka by name, came to the rolling waters of Pushkara to lave her shapely limbs in its cool depths. Her he saw, the ascetic of stern vows, blazing in his energy; she was a dream of beauty, even as the lambent lightning playing through dark clouds surcharged with rain. The bright god of Love, that mischievous boy, was at hand and from his magic bow shot forth his straightest shaft and mightiest, right at the heart of the sage of iron will; and, as if in response, there burst forth, all unknown to himself, the heart-cry of burning passion, fierce, consuming and not to be denied.

"Welcome, thrice welcome, thou fairest maid in heaven or earth ! Dwell thou with me and be my love. Faint am I with passion and of my wits reft; let me but look into the dark depths of thine eyes and lose myself in a dream of bliss."

"As my lord willeth" replied the bashful one; and dwelt with him in that peaceful retreat, a fatal check to his mighty Tapas.

Bright summers five and five flew over the heads of the happy pair, in a sweet dream of blissful love; and Visvamitra woke up from it one woeful day, pitiful shame in his looks and dull grief gnawing at his heart. All at once a light broke upon his brain and he cried out in anguish, "Fool that I was, not to see that this was a snare set to entrap my unwary feet, by those relentless foes of mine, the

Devas. What ! ! twice five years by mortal count and to my blinded eyes it seemed but a day and a night ! I have to thank myself and my blind passion for this cursed obstacle that has nipped my hopes in the bud."

Burning sighs broke from his noble heart and cruel repentance dug its brazen claws therein. Looking up, he saw her before him, the unwilling partner of his ruin, the golden-hued Menaka, trembling in affright, her flower-soft hands raised to him in mute appeal for pardon. The sight filled his heart with sweet pity with gentle words and sad, he sent away the witching siren, all too glad to escape so lightly.

Then he set his face to the north and took his weary way to the great mountains, even where the bright Kausiki gladdens the earth ; and having made a mighty resolve to win or die in the attempt, he engaged himself in a long course of stern observances.

A thousand years went by and the bright gods quaked in awe to see him there, grim and stern, his heart still set on his mighty quest. Swift coursed they and the holy sages along with them, to the Heavens of Brahma. "Let this terrible man be pacified" they implored "with the gift of the high rank of a Maharshi."

" Be it so ", rejoined the great Father and be took himself to where sat that Tapas incarnate. " Fair son," so came forth the accents sweet, " All hail ! a Maharshi thou ! Well pleased am I with thy intense Tapas and willingly do I confer on thee the highest rank among the sages of the earth."

But, Visvamitra, his calm heart in no way ruffled with grief or joy, returned answer meet to the Omnipotent One. " Then am I " cried he, with hands of joined prayer the while, " beyond all doubt, the proud controller of the rebellious senses, in as much my lord has deigned to speak

of me as having won, by holy deeds all mine own, the high pre-eminence of a Maharshi."

"Not yet" broke in Brahma "not yet thine, the undisputed sway over the fleeting senses. Long lies the road before thee and steep, ere thou attain that dizzy eminence. Toil on, brave one". And forthwith he went back to his seat of bliss.

Visvamitra saw them depart, the gods hard to please, and began anew, with unflagging zeal, his Tapas sterner far and fiercer. With arms raised above his head on high, stood he there without a prop, the viewless air his only food. The burning heat of summer played on his devoted head, while fierce fires, four in number, blazed around his wasted frame. The dark clouds, heavy-charged, poured on his defenceless head their ceaseless stream of arrows straight. The chill months, day and night, found him there, deep immersed in freezing waters ; and so during those long years of weary toil.

Mighty fear took relentless hold of Indra and his celestial host, as they viewed with awe and wonder the royal sage pursuing his end with grim tenacity and a dauntless heart. Then summoned Indra unto his presence, Rambha, the fairest of the daughters of Heaven and the wiliest ; and in council full, unfolded unto her a plan, their ends to achieve and foil the determined efforts of the dread Aspirer.

CHAPTER 64.

Visvamitra and Rambha.

"Rambha ! you are to render the celestials a great service ; beguile Visvamitra and inspire desire and delusion of heart in him."

So said Indra of mighty intellect; and Rambha, joining her palms, replied to him shyly, "Lord of the Shining Ones! this great sage Visvamitra is a terrible man to approach; of a certainty he will let loose his wrath upon me, frightful to bear. That is why I am afraid to go; and you will take pity on my poor self and excuse me from the task."

Indra calmed the trembling one, who raised her hands and eyes to him in sweet appeal. "Fear not, Rambha; perform my behests and you shall come to no harm. I will stay with you; and the koil with heart-ravishing notes, the spring in the pride of his bloom and luxuriance and not the least, the God of Love himself shall be your assistants in your difficult task. Assume a dazzling form in which all your charms shall be displayed and lure away his heart from his austerities."

And following his directions, Rambha, the loveliest of the lovely Apsarasas, excelled herself, if possible and with radiant smiles and alluring glances, set about to shake the equanimity of the fiery ascetic.

The sweet strains of the Koil fell on his ears and raising his eyes, he saw, with a pleased heart, the witching Siren. The delicious music of her voice, the no less sweet notes of the Koil, and her all-compelling beauty roused strange feelings in his heart, inexpressible joy, but with a dash of suspicion in it. He was not long in finding out that it was a ruse of Indra to shake his high resolve (Indra, his relentless enemy, was at his old dirty tricks again). His anger blazed forth and a terrible curse shot out from his lips.

"Thou wicked wench! seekest thou to draw me away from my pious meditations, who have set his heart on subduing desire and hate? Twice five thousand winters shall thou drag a miserable existence, a block of stone, a living

corpse. And so shalt thou remain, a fitting victim of my just wrath, until a Brahmana of high spiritual might and radiant presence shall raise thee from the depths of misery."

So spake the great sage and paused; for his heart was sad and sore and he had not yet learned to hold in check his rising anger. But the dire curse came upon Rambha then and there and turned her divine beauty into shapeless stone. Her affrighted helpers, Love and Spring, vanished into thin air at the first blast of the tempestuous wrath.

His terrible outburst of temper robbed him of his hard-earned spiritual power and he ate his heart away at having failed to curb his passions. He raised his hands aloft and uttered a mighty vow. "Never again shall I give way unto this accursed wrath; never again shall word of mine pass these lips; nay, I will hold in my breath, even if it be for hundreds and thousands of years. I will trample down my rebellious senses and dry up this withered body until I attain through the force of my austerities, the coveted rank of a Brahmana. I will remain without any sustenance and with suppressed breath for endless years and my life-currents shall not waste away when I am absorbed in Tapas." With an undaunted spirit, did he set himself to carry out this terrible vow, unheard of before among men, and entered upon his dreadful task.

CHAPTER 65.

Visvamitra, the Brahmarshi.

Thereafter the great sage left the slopes of the Himalaya for its western parts and renewed his dread Tapas. Of a truth, it was unparallelled in the annals of men and seemed almost an impossible task—his vow of absolute silence for a thousand years When the long

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period drew to a close, Visvamitra had become as impervious to external sensations as any block of wood or stone. Countless were the obstacles thrown in his path by the ever watchful gods, but Anger failed to find a way into his heart. Terrible was the vow he made and right manfully did he keep it.

The thousand years are past and the man of iron will sits down to break his long fast; when, Indra comes unto him as a Brahmana and asks to be fed. At once the sage of mighty vows offers him the ready food with all reverence. and true to his vow of silence, he speaks not a word to the Brahmana, who ate what Visvamitra was about to sit down to after long years of fasting.

Another thousand years did he carry on his Tapas, more terrible, if possible, in that he breathed not. His life breaths restrained within his frame, thick clouds of smoke began to issue from the crown of his head and lighted up the three worlds, stupefying the beings therein. Distracted through the overpowering energy of the sage, deprived of their natural brilliance by his awful Tapas and rendered dull and heavy, Gods and Asuras, Gandharvas Pannagas and Rakshasas sought the presence of the Lotus-born One and lifted unto him hands of despair and woe-begone countenances.

"We are at our wit's end, having exhausted all our arts to beguile the terrible Visvamitra or to rouse him to anger; but, alas! our anxious labors do but render the progress of his Tapas the more rapid. Search as we would, we could not find the least flaw in him, nay, not the slightest, not the subtlest. Deny him the desire of his heart and he will, through the worlds, send dire ruin and destroy every object of creation therein The quarters, behold! are dull and dark · the ocean waves toss their rebellious crests on high; the mighty hills are rent in twain; the earth trembles in affright and the wind blows in sullen gusts. Lord on high!

our eyes see not beyond the present; men turn scoffers of the Almighty and of His Law of Right. The worlds stand in dull despair, relieved by fits of anxious care. The bright sun is but a dark cloud before the fiery radiance of the sage. Hasten thou to soften the heart of Visvamitra, ere he sets his mind upon reducing the whole creation to nothing through the fire of his Tapas. Grant him anything he asks, be it the empire of the Gods on high."

Brahma placed himself at the head of the low-spirited Gods and proceeding to where the great-souled Visvamitra was engaged in his stern Tapas, addressed him in accents sweet and soothing. "Hail! Brahmarshi! is it all well with thee? Thy austere Tapas has won our grace and has placed thee in the foretront of the twice-born ones. Take thou from me the happy boon of long life, which the assembled Gods are only too glad to confirm. All good be thine, thou holy One! Free thou art, to turn thy steps wherever it may list thee."

The words of the Self-born One and the attendant gods fell sweet on the hungry ears of the sage of terrible vows; and with a glad heart and joined palms, did he hasten to reply, "If granted I am the proud status of a Brahmana and length of years beyond mortals, let Omkara, Vashatkara and the Vedas be fruitful in me even as they are among the regenerate ones. Let Vasishtha, the mind-born son of Brahma, recognise me as such, for he stands peerless among those who are proficient in the Vedas that regulate the lives of the Brahmanas and Kshatrias. Let the bright Immortals here give their assent thereunto. Accomplish this, the dearest wish of my heart and go where you like."

Thereat, the Shining Ones approached Vasishtha and besought the Brahmarshi to make friends with his brother sage.

"Be it even so" replied he, and acknowledged Visvamitra as his equal. "A Brahmarshi art thou and no doubt of it. Everything shalt thou achieve as promised by the divine Ones." And the delighted Gods went back unto their abodes.

Thereupon, Visvamitra, having achieved the goal of his long and severe efforts and raised himself to the rank of a Brahmana, rendered affectionate reverence unto Vasishtha of mighty spells. And ever afterwards, he wandered over the Earth, engaged in holy Tapas.

It was thus, Rama dear, that the high-souled One won the rank of a Brahmana, impossible to attain. And here he stands, the best and foremost of sages. In him you see Tapas incarnate. Ever wedded is he unto Right. He is the highest ideal of human valour and prowess" So spake Satananda, of radiant presence, while Janaka and the princely youths drank in the tale with eager ears.

Then the monarch turned to the mighty descendant of Kusika and spoke overjoined palms of reverence. "High shines my star and thrice blessed am I, in that thy august self has deigned to be present at this my sacrifice along with the royal youths of the line of Ikshwaku. Best of saints! Envied of men! all pure is my soul and free of stain, for I have set my eyes on thee to-day; nay, I stand enriched by many an undreamt grace of heart and mind thereby. Fortunate am I and Rama too, of noble heart, in that it was given us to listen to the holy recital of thy high ascetic deeds. Now is it that we have some idea, though a faint one, of thy rare excellences and great worth. Thy Tapas is something inconceivable, thy might and thy graces of the head and the heart. Why, an easier task were it to seek to fathom the nature and greatness of the Self born One or of the Lord of the Mountain Queen. Never can I hear enough of thy

marvellous deeds ; but, lo ! the envious sun hangs low in the West and calls us to the evening prayers. May I pray thee to honour me with thy sacred presence here, the earliest hour to-morrow ? All glory be thine, thou best of ascetics! I hope I have thy leave to withdraw."

To which the holy One returned meet answer, praising high the noble king, and gladly gave him leave to retire. Thereupon, Janaka and his kin reverently went round the World-honoured One, Satananda leading them on. Visvamitra then left for his quarters, while the assembled sages rose to do him glad reverence ; and Rama and his brother followed in his wake.

CHAPTER 66.

The Coming of Sita.

Brightly smiled the morn, when, his daily worship over, Janaka requested the presence of Visvamitra and his princely disciples. Having offered unto them due welcome and respect, even as the Holy Books lay it down, he addressed himself to Visvamitra and said " Your Reverence ! what behest of thine shall I hasten to obey ? For, ever thine humble servant am I, to dispose of me as thou wilt."

And to him the eloquent sage made meek reply. "These royal youths, of wide-spread fame, are the bright sons of Dasaratha, Lord of Ayodhya ; they desire to have a sight of the bow that is in thy keeping. Place it before them and let them depart hence, the desire of their hearts gratified."

" Be pleased, wise One !" rejoined Janaka, " to listen to me, while I narrate to you how that wonderful bow came to stay with me. My ancestor, Devarata, sixth in descent from Nimi, the founder of our line, was given it to keep in safe custody.

Long ages ago, Daksha, the Patriarch, celebrated a grand sacrifice, in the course of which the assembled gods reserved not a portion of the offerings for the absent Mahadeva. Whereupon, the Wielder of the Trident waxed mighty wroth. He strode up to them with blazing eyes and cried, "This terrible bow of mine shall I never lay down, till every proud head before me rolls in the dust." The affrighted ones clasped his feet with humble prayers and with sweet words and repentant, chased away his awful ire. And the Moon-crested One, mollified therewith, handed over to them his redoubtable bow; and they again entrusted it to the safe keeping of my ancestor.

Once upon a time, I was ploughing a piece of ground to celebrate a sacrifice thereon, when, lo! there rose from the furrow, this gem of a girl, whom I took unto my heart. The curious circumstances under which she came to me gave her the name Sita and she grew apace, the Daughter of the Earth, life of my life, my other self.

Her I have made the prize of Valor, to be won of the strongest arm, and the boldest heart. The best and proudest of the Earth sought her hand in marriage, the marvellous child, that came not of human womb; but one and all of them I sent away with the reply "None but the brave deserve the fair." Then the suitors all came to Mithila to try their chance and win the prize: but none of them, not one, succeeded in bending the redoubtable bow. Why, they failed to raise it from where it lay! Assured beyond doubt of their puny might, I dismissed them in no happy frame of mind. And, in the rage that filled their hearts, they joined their forces and besieged the fair Mithila, for ten long months and two. They knew that my forces were few and my coffers low; and the shame of defeat goaded them to work grievous ruin upon my lovely capital. At the end of the year my resources were exhausted and blank

despair stared me in the face. But, I roused myself and won over the mighty Gods to grant me powerful armies: with which, I put to rout that evil crew, their ministers and their forces and scattered them to the winds.

And that famous bow, the apple of discord, blazing in its energy, am I but too glad to show unto these royal youths. If it so come about that Rama should string it, then will I, all willing, bestow on that son of Dasaratha, the daughter of my heart, Sita, who comes not of mortal parents.

CHAPTER 67.

The Broken Bow.

"Well have you spoken" said Visvamitra "and now let Rama have a sight of the famous bow."

Janaka turned to his officers and said "Convey here the celestial bow and render it due worship, of sweet incense and fragrant wreaths."

"On our heads be it" replied they and proceeding to the Royal palace, bore thence the bow divine. Full five hundred men, strong and stalwart, laboured hard to drag thither the black case of solid iron, eight-wheeled, in whose depths lay the mighty bow The ministers placed it before their king and said "Here is the famous bow that the princes of the Earth hold in such high honour and that you wanted these princes to see."

Thereupon, Janaka respectfully addressed himself to the sage and the princely pair "Here have I placed before you the peerless bow, held in high worship by the monarchs of my house. The best and bravest of the Earth have failed to essay the impossible task of stringing it. The very Gods, Asuras, Rakshasas, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Kin-

nara., Uragas, nay, none of them, succeeded in using it, or stringing it, or raising it or handling it or even moving it from where it lay ; why, then, speak of puny mortals? I have obeyed thy behests and have caused it to be brought here ; the princes are welcome to examine it."

Visvamitra heard him out and turned himself to Raghava. "Rama, dear, behold the bow."

At his word, Rama advanced to where it lay in its iron case, heaved up the lid, cast his eyes over it and said· "Master mine, have I your permission to handle the bow? May be I would try to lift it or to bend it."

"Be it so" exclaimed the king and the sage

Then Sri Rama grasped the weapon by the middle and held it aloft as if it were a feather, while the assembled thousand gazed in hushed amaze. Anon, he strung it and drew it even to his ear, when lo! the mighty bow snapped in twain right at the middle Awful was the crash, as when the bolts of heaven are loosened on the earth by the mighty arm of their Master The earthquaked to her very foundations, as when mighty mountains are rent in twain Every one there was struck senseless by the tremendous shock, and none save the king the great sage and the princes could stand it.

When the spectators struggled back to their senses' Janaka, his heart relieved of a load of anxiety, approached Visvamitra and said to him in deep respect, "Witnessed have I to-day the might and valour of the worthy son of Dasaratha, wonderful, inconceivable, and undreamt of by me. And Sita, the child of my heart, will now be the happy wife of Rama and shed a brighter glory on the royal House of Janaka. Fortunate am I, in that I have kept my word that my daughter shall be the bride of the strongest arm and the bravest heart. and her do I give, dearer to

me than life itself, in marriage to Rama. With thy permission, let ministers of mine hasten to Ayodhya on fleet cars, to entreat the royal Dasaratha to grace my humble abode. They shall acquaint him with the happy news of the prize that his valiant son has won here, my peerless daughter. Let them also tell him that his darling sons are safe in my capital and happy under the mighty protection of Visvamitra."

So spake Janaka, most eloquent ; and the holy One signifying his assent thereto, the king despatched his trusted ministers to Ayodhya with precise orders to inform Dasaratha of what transpired at Mithila and request the favour of his presence there.

CHAPTER 68.

Dasaratha invited to Mithila.

Janaka's messengers spent three days on the road and with tired steeds, reached the lordly Ayodhya on the fourth.

Approaching the royal palace, they spake unto the wardens, " Haste ye and inform your lord and master that the envoys of Janaka await his pleasure."

Dasaratha was informed of this at once and back they conveyed his commands to the messengers, " Ye are welcome to enter the royal palace, glorious in its magnificence."

They did so and soon stood in the presence of the Lord of Kosala, the aged Dasaratha, like unto the Angels of Light. With folded palms and restrained selves, the messengers humbly addressed the king in sweet words and calm. " Our master Janaka, the Ruler of Mithila, makes anxious enquiries through us again and again, in sweet and friendly terms, of thy well-being and peace of heart. Is it well with thee and with thy kinsmen ?. Is thy heart

ever engaged in the welfare of thy subjects? Do the household Fires receive due worship at thy hands? Thy priests and teachers, is it all well with them? Does the current of their lives flow on smoothly and are they ever intent upon the search for Truth and upon the proper discharge of the duties of their high office? Are thy people happy and contented as ever? Next, with the permission of the great Viswamitra, he ventures to place before thee this request. 'It is not unknown to thee that I have instituted a trial of valour and skill among the various princes of the Earth and mighty warriors; my daughter Sita, of divine beauty, is the prize of him who wins over the heads of the competitors. Great kings and famous warriors sought her hand and essayed the test I have set for them, but they were as nothing before thy valiant son who chanced to come here in the wake of the sage Viswamitra. Thy god-like boy distanced them unspeakably and carried away the prize of valour from among the midst of countless champions, older in years, renowned kings of the Earth and veterans worn with fight and grown grey in war. In a vast concourse of the assembled multitudes of the Earth, princes and peasants, warriors and citizens, saints and sages, thy son, Sri Rama, of divine presence, broke in twain the wonderful bow entrusted to me by the Lord Mahadeva. And so I should, as promised, give my daughter Sita in marriage to him as the prize of Valour. I entreat thy consent to my request and pray thee to enable me keep my word. Deign thou to bless my humble abode with thy presence along with thy saintly priests and teachers. Tarry not, for thou shouldst, of a truth, behold thy lordly sons even now. It behoves thee to gladden a friend's heart and I doubt not that thou wilt give inexpressible pleasure to thy dear sons.' Thus does our lord and master, King Janaka of Mithila, speak to thee, in accents sweet and wise. Viswamitra sanctions his request and graciously thinks

with him." They delivered themselves thus and paused, restrained by the lordly presence of the ruler of Ayodhya.

Dasaratha heard the message of his friend and brother king ; it sank deep into his heart and gladdened it beyond words. He turned himself to his spiritual guides, Vasishtha and Vamadeva and to his other councillors and said, " Kausalya's Delight and my heart's joy, resides at present at the capital of the Videhas, led thereunto by the mighty Visvamitra, who extends over them his envied protection. Janaka, the great-souled One, has had an opportunity of acquainting himself in person with the might and prowess of Rama ; and now he desires to give his daughter in marriage unto Raghava. If his proposal seems good and fitting in your eyes, (and Janaka is not unknown to you as a royal sage), we should make haste to proceed to his capital, for it becomes us not to delay."

The sages assembled and the ministers, whose hearts were ever turned towards the interest of their master, expressed their joyful assent and approval. Then, Dasaratha gave it out to his ministers that he intended starting the next day. Meanwhile, the envoys of Janaka were invited to pass the night there and with right royal welcome and cheerful talk, the hours passed away.

CHAPTER 69.

Janaka and Dasaratha.

The next morning Dasaratha repaired to the council-chamber where he his kinsmen and priests awaited his presence. He called unto him Sumantra the Faithful and said "Let those in charge of the Royal Treasury start to day in advance and take with them large stores of gold and gems. The armies of our kingdom shall be ready

to march as soon as I give word, elephant, horse, foot and, chariot; the conveyances relays and baggage-vans shall company them. Kindly request the holy sages Vasishtha, Vamadeva, Jabali, Kasyapa, and Markandeya the long-lived, to honour me by going in advance; and have my chariot ready as soon as you can. Janaka's envoys are hurrying us and we have already delayed too long".

It was done, and in no time were they on the road, the sages in advance, the king next, and the army following behind. They marched by easy stages and on the fifth day sighted the realms of Janaka, who, duly informed of their approach, welcomed them right royally.

Soon he met the aged monarch and his heart rejoiced thereat. "Had your majesty a pleasant journey hither and safe?" inquired he affectionately of his royal guest. "Honoured am I beyond words by your gracious visit to my humble place. Soon shall your heart rejoice to see the laurels your noble boy has won from many an older rival. And may I hope that the holy One there, even Vasishtha, has had a pleasant journey and the countless Brahmanas that have blessed my fortunate country by coming along with him. Verily do I seem to behold again the Ruler of the Immortals, Indra, girt by his band of Shining Ones. Sure am I that my dark days are over and my race stands high in the esteem of the worlds, in that I have been fortunate to secure an alliance with the high-souled Raghus, that mighty line of warriors. The morning Sun rises on the last day of my sacrificial rite and at its close I wish the wedding to be celebrated. The sages approve of it and I add my own request if it would be of any use."

To which, the aged Dasaratha replied in apt and skilful words (and he was no novice at that). "Friend of my heart!" said he, with a meaning glance at the sages around "have I heard right that the receiver of a gift

awaits the pleasure and the convenience of the giver ? You are to us the ideal of all virtues and we are ever glad to abide by your directions."

Janaka of Videha was struck with amaze at this reply of the saintly Dasaratha of straight speech, so thoroughly consonant as it was with righteousness and so highly redounding to his praise. They parted for the night and it was a pleasant time for the sages, who enjoyed unfeigned delight in the company of their brothers in wisdom, old friends and mates.

While, to the aged Dasaratha, it was the happiest day of his life. He could never gaze enough at his dear boys and his eyes were never off their lovely faces for a moment. What with the joy at being restored to his loved ones and what with the princely and hearty welcome of Janaka, the night wore away all too soon.

On his part, Janaka brought the sacrificial rite to a happy conclusion. Great was the glory of his spirit, for he was the wisest of his age and his eye saw into the Heart of things ; and in the sweet company of his daughters did the winged Hours pass in swift flight, in peace of heart and joyful anticipation.

CHAPTER 70.

The Race of the Sun.

The next morning, Janaka, having finished his daily round of religious observances, turned to his chaplain Satananda, even as he sat in the midst of the sages, and said, " It is not unknown to you that Kusadhvaja, my younger brother, of great energy, resides in the blessed Sankasya ; magnificient, even as the Pushpaka, the aerial car, it is

situated on the banks of Ikshumati, whose furthest limits extend unto the sharp stakes let into the bed of the rapid river. Him do I desire to see, for he is the protector of my sacrifice; and he should, of a truth, share this joy with me."

He spoke and soon there stood before him messengers, quick of grasp, skilful of speech and fleet of foot; and at the command of the king, they were away, on swift horses, to bring the royal Kusadhvaja; even so do the messengers of Indra haste for the Lord Vishnu. They were at Sankasya in no time and communicated unto its ruler the pleasure of his royal brother. He lost no time in complying with it and very soon had the pleasure of touching the feet of the godlike Janaka and his high priest Satananda. Janaka directed him to take his seat; then sent for the prime minister, Sudaman, and said to him, "Seek thou audience of the Ruler of Ayodhya, and request his presence here with his sons and ministers."

Sudaman bowed low to his master and proceeded straight to the royal quarters of Dasaratha, to whom he respectfully conveyed the message of his lord. "Monarch of Ayodhya! my master would know if it would please you to go over to his residence, with your sons, priests, chaplain and others."

"We follow you" replied Dasaratha and very soon he was at the royal palace of Janaka, accompanied by his kinsmen, the holy sages and his countless retinue. "Your Majesty!" said he "the holy Vasishtha here is the patron saint of the line of Ikshvaku; he is our spokesman on every important occasion and you know it. With the permission of Visvamitra and the other sages here, he will now proclaim our royal lineage to all who may list."

He spoke and ceased; and Vasishtha, turning to Janaka and the assembled kings, spoke thus. "From the Unmanifested One issued Brahma; and from the Four-faced One,

eternal, ancient and unchanging, was born Marichi ; Marichi begat Kasyapa ; Kasyapa begat Vivaswan ; Vivaswan begat Manu, known as the Vaivaswata, the first Lord of Men ; Manu begat Ikshvaku, the first king of Ayodhya ; Ikshvaku begat Kukshi ; Kukshi begat Vikukshi ; Vikukshi begat Bana ; Bana begat Anaranya ; Anaranya begat Prithu ; Prithu begat Trisanku ; Trisanku begat Dundhumara ; Dundhumara begat Yuvanaswa ; Yuvanaswa begat Mandhata ; Mandhata begat Susandhi ; Susandhi begat Dhruvasandhi and Prasenajit ; Dhruvasandhi begat Bharata ; Bharata begat Asita.

And him did his foes, the Haihayas, the Talajanghas and the Sasabindus, confront in battle ; his forces defeated and dispersed, the weak and spiritless Asita fled from his kingdom, and took refuge in the solitary depths of Bhrigu Prasravana and with him his ministers. Two wives had he, big with child at that time. One of them bore a bitter hatred towards the other and managed to poison her food. At that time, Chyavana, of the line of Bhrigu, a sage of mighty powers, lived thereabouts ; and him did one of the queens wait upon to be blessed with a fair boy. Kalindi (as she was called) the fair-eyed, (it was she who was poisoned by her rival) approached the Holy One and prayed to have a son born unto her. "In thy womb" replied he "there lies a son of immeasurable strength, great lustre and unfathomable energy. But, poison, terrible in its effects, permeates his frame. Grieve not, noble lady! for he will come to no mishap through that." She bowed and retired ; and unto her, devoted to her lord and heavy of heart at his misfortune, there was born, through the grace of Chyavana, a son, who came out of the womb even with the poison upon him administered unto his mother by her rival. Hence the world knew him as Sagara.

Sagara begat Asamanjas ; Asamanjas begat Amsuman ; Amsuman begat Dilipa ; Dilipa begat Bhagiratha ;

Bhagiratha begat Kakutstha; Kakutstha begat Raghu; Raghu begat Pravriddha, the Man-eater, otherwise known as Kalmashapada; Pravriddha begat Sankhana; Sankhana begat Sudarsana; Sudarsana begat Agnivarna; Agnivarna begat Sighraga; Sighraga begat Maru; Maru begat Prasusruka; Prasusruka begat Ambarisha; Ambarisha begat Nahusha; Nahusha begat Yayati; Yayati begat Nabhagha; Nabhagha begat Aja; Aja begat Dasaratha; Dasaratha begat Rama and his brother Lakshmana.

And on behalf of the brothers, the worthy descendants of Ikshvaku, whose royal race is characterised by spotless purity, devotion to virtue, valor and straight speech, even unto the utmost, I ask of you your daughters in marriage. Happy will be the alliance and approved of by all, since the parties are so highly worthy of each other."

CHAPTER 71

The line of Janaka.

And to him thus speaking, replied Janaka, in all reverence, "Hail to thee! great sage! it behoves one who gives away his child in marriage to proclaim his ancestry, if he come of a high and pure race. So, do me the favor to listen to me while I go through the line of my forefathers of happy memory.

"There lived, of yore, a king, by name Nimi, a pattern of everything good and holy. The first and best of men, he won for himself immortal renown in all the worlds by his mighty deeds. Mithi was his son and he gave his name unto Mithila, of which he was the founder. He was the first who bore the name of Janaka; and after him Udavasu, Nandivardhana, Suketu, Devarata, Brihadratha, Mahavira, Sudhriti of great fortitude and prowess, Dhrishtaketu,

Haryasva, Maru, Pratindhaka, Kîrtiratha, Dêvamîdha, Vibudha, Mahîdhraka, Kîrtiratha, Mahâroma, Swarnaroma, and Hrisvaroma ruled in succession, father and son.

And to the last, of noble soul, who knew better than many others the Mysteries of the Great Law, were born two sons, myself and next to me, the valiant Kusadhwaja.

After a long and happy reign, my father placed me in his seat and sought the quiet solitudes of the forest, committing to my charge the kingdom and my brother. And when my father departed for the bright abodes of the Blessed, I ruled over the land, following in the path of Justice trod by my ancestors of old, and with a brother's fond love cherished Kusadhwaja, the apple of my eye.

Sometime after, Sudhanva, the powerful ruler of Sankâsyâ, besieged Mithilâ and sent me this insulting message, " Fail not to send me the bow of Siva that thou hast in thy keeping and thy lotus-eyed daughter Sîtâ along with it". Of course I could not put up with such an ungracious demand ; and in consequence, went forth to meet him in battle and laid him low. And to Kusadhwaja, whose valour gained me the day, I made over the kingdom of Sudhanva. I am the first born of my father and he comes next to me. Verily shall I give my daughters in marriage unto your sons of mighty renown, Sîtâ of godlike beauty to Râma, who bore her of as the prize of valour; and Ûrmilâ, her sister, to Lakshmana. Doubt me not ; you have my hand and word upon it, once, twice and thrice. It is with a glad heart that I keep my plighted troth; it is a pleasure to me and an honor to give my girls into your house. So, lose no time in going through the preliminary rites of marriage—Samâvartana and Nândî Srâddhas. The constellation Magha rules over this day ; and on the third from this, shalt we perform the marriage under Uttara Phalguni. For, I shall, of a truth, give my girls in marriage to your sons Râma and Lakshmana.

CHAPTER 72

THE GODÂNA

THEN answered him Visvâmitra, while Vasishtha signified his assent thereto; "The royal houses of Ikshwâku and Vidêha, inconceivable is their glory and immeasurable. Search as you may, you come not across any that stand beside these. Râma and Lakshmana, Sîtâ and Ûrmilâ stand beautifully matched, in beauty of form and righteousness of heart. But one more word I beseech you. Kusadhwaja here, your worthy brother, is the father of two maidens of peerless beauty ; and them I would even ask of you in marriage unto the great-souled princes, Bharata and Satrughna. Sons of the royal Dasaratha, the beautiful youths, of god-like prowess, yield not the palm to the great Deities themselves that rule the spheres. Grant my request, and knit in bonds indissoluble the royal houses of Ikshwâku and Janaka."

This proposal of the sage of holy vows, fell honey-sweet on the ears of the Lord of Mithilâ ; and doubly so, in that they were warmly supported by Vasishtha ; and he hastened to reply in all reverence.

"Thrice blessed indeed is my house, inasmuch as your holy selves are pleased to pronounce the alliance a well-matched one. Hail ! saintly ones ! Be it so ; let Bharata and Satrughna take the daughters of Kusadhwaja to wife. A beautiful sight it would be to see the four maidens wedded to the four royal sons of Dasaratha on the same day. The wise astrologers hold that the most auspicious day for marriage is that on which the moon is in conjunction with the asterism Uttara Phalguni ; for, Bhaga, the Lord of Generation, is ruler thereof."

He stood up and approaching the holy pair, resumed, "Your humble pupil am I, to whom you have deigned to show high favor. May you be pleased to grace these excellent seats. Daṣaratha lords these wide domains of mine and he grants me no less lordship over Ayôdhyâ. Hesitate not to exercise your authority here and do what you will with your own."

Then replied unto him the Lord of Ayôdhya "You and your worthy brother here, are famed over the earth for your manifold graces of heart and mind. Right royally have you entertained the sages and the numerous kings here. All good be yours. Give me leave to retire to my quarters, for I have to perform the preliminary Srâddhas."

And with the permission of Janaka, Daṣaratha repaired unto his palace, and Viṣvâmitra and Vasishthâ along with him. The Srâddhas were duly conducted and the next morning, the king set about to perform the Gift of Kine. Hundreds of thousands did he give away to pious Brâhmaṇas, to secure the welfare of his sons. A hundred thousand cows, full-yielding, he gave away in the name of each one of his sons,—their horns plated with gold, each with its calf and milking vessel of bronze. And in honor of that glorious occasion of the Gift of Kine, did he make the virtuous Brâhmaṇas royal presents of untold wealth. The rites over, the aged Monarch sat there in the midst of his four sons and looked as grand and glorious as the Self-born One, surrounded by the Guardians of the Worlds on high.

CHAPTER 73

THE WEDDING

THAT selfsame day did Yuḏhâjiṯ, son of the Kêkaya king and uncle to Bharaṯa on his mother's side, reach Mithilâ. Ḏaṣaraṯha welcomed him warmly ; and after mutual enquiries of welfare, did the visitor address the Lord of Kôsala. " The Ruler of Kêkaya makes anxious inquiries after your well-being and desires me to tell you that those in whose welfare you are interested, enjoy peace and happiness. His heart yearns for a sight of my sister's boy and I am here to take him back. They told me at Ayôḏhyâ, that you had come over here with your sons to celebrate their marriage ; and all eager to see my nephew, did I hasten here on the wings of speed."

A welcome guest was he to Ḏaṣaraṯha, who entertained the worthy prince right royally. A happy night they passed ; and next morning Ḏaṣaraṯha finished his religious observances and followed the sages on to the sacrificial grounds. At the auspicious moment, Vijaya, Râma and his brothers, having completed the preliminary rites, came to the place in the wake of Vasishtha and the other sages of holy vows and sat by their royal sire.

Then rose up Vasishtha and spoke to Janaka. " Ḏaṣaraṯha, the Lord of Ayôḏhyâ and his sons have come here ready for the consummation of the marriage, and await the pleasure of the Giver. Eternal blessings crown the heads of him that gives and him that takes. Perform this marriage and act up to your traditions."

At which words of the holy Vasishtha, Janaka, broad of heart and profound in his knowledge of Righteousness, cried out " Who stands warden at my gate and yet

awaits my orders to inform me of the arrival of my royal guests? This kingdom is yours to command and curious is your hesitation to make yourself at home in it. My daughters, behold them seated near the altar, like lambent tongues of flame; they have gone through the preliminary rites and I but await your arrival. Why not my royal brother proceed straight hither, but tarries?"

Daşaratha accepted the kind invitation and hastened to enter the hall and the princes and the sages along with him.

Janaka then turned to Vasishtha and prayed, "Holy one! Thou and thy saintly brethren here, conduct the marriage rites of Râma, the Worlds' Delight."

"So be it" replied the sage, and proceeding to the altar along with Vişvâmitra and Şatânanda, laid out the fire-place therein and decorated it with sweet perfumes and bright flowers. Fresh shoots peeped out from many a vessel of gold, from many a branching vase, from many a jewelled bowl, ranged upon it in neat procession, while countless censers wafted sweet perfumes over the hall. Shells, spoons, ladles, salvers, ready prepared to welcome the honored guest, fried corn and colored rice unbroken in gemmed goblets, stood there in magnificient array. With solemn rites they spread the sacred grass thereon and lighted the holy fire, while Vasishtha made offerings to the Radiant God. Janaka then led forward Sîtâ gaily attired for the occasion and placed her before the Fire, in front of Râma, and spoke these words of solemn import.

"Sîtâ here, my daughter, shares with thee the duties of life. Accept her from me in sign of holy wedlock. May all good be thine.

A faithful wife she will prove to thee, my noble girl, and will ever be with thee, even as thy own shadow.'

He paused and poured over Râma's hands the consecrated water. Shouts of applause and approval from sages

and gods shook the hall and rang along the welkin ; celestial music played on high and flowers of heavenly fragrance rained on the happy couple.

Sîtâ thus given in marriage with due rites, Janaka next turned to Lakshmaṉa and with a joyful heart exclaimed, " Come unto me, Lakshmaṉa, and recieve from me my daughter Ûrmilâ, whom I bestow upon you. Be quick about it and all good be yours."

Bharaṯa's turn came next and to him said Janaka, "Noble scion of the race of Raghu! Take thou Mâṉdavî unto thee for wife"; and last came Ṣaṯrughna, to whom Janaka made over Ṣruṯakîrṯi with the words " Join ye your hands in holy bands of matrimony. Every one of you is blessed with all desirable graces of body and mind and have kept your observances; and it is but meet that you take upon yourselves the duties of a householder's life."

Whereupon, the four royal youths clasped the hands of the four maidens, directed thereunto by the holy Vasishtha. The princes then went round the Sacred Fire, the altar, Janaka and the sages assembled ; and the after-marriage rites were duly gone through as enjoined by the Holy Books. And no sooner did the bridal pairs join hands than the delighted gods showered upon their happy heads the flowers of heaven. Music gay and martial, blended with the sweet strains of the golden-throated Gaṉdharvas, while the lovely Apsarasas danced in joyous throng thereto. Such was the wonderful sight witnessed on the wedding day of those illustrious descendants of Raghu. And with the joyful notes still in their ears, did the valiant youths pace the Sacred Fires around, once, twice and thrice and lead their happy brides homeward ; while, girt by his kinsfolk, did Janaka follow near, fondly gazing.

CHAPTER 74

RÂMA OF THE AXE

WHEN the shades of Night melted away before the golden shafts of the Orb of Day, Visvâmitra took kind leave of the kings and departed for his distant home in the north, leaving behind him his mighty blessings, that hovered around the princes even as ministering angels. And close upon that came the departure of king Dasaratha for his capital, to which his brother-king gave reluctant leave.

Loth to part, Janaka followed him a long way; and right royal was the dowry he bestowed on his girls. Herds of kine past count; rare and costly carpets; cloths of lovely texture and priceless value; untold wealth in gold and gems, coral and pearl, slaves and servants, horses and elephants, chariots and troops, magnificiently attired and gaily caparisoned; these and many other gifts evidenced his loving heart and royal munificience. It was with much ado that Dasaratha could persuade the happy king to turn back to his capital.

Well, it was over, the painful parting; and the Ruler of Ayôdhyâ, set his face towards his capital and journeyed thither by easy stages, in the sweet company of his noble sons and the saintly hermits.

And him thus proceeding, there met the frightful cries of birds, ill-omened and harsh; while the beasts of the earth passed from right to left, signs of good, strangely contradicting the former. His heart in a quiver with fatherly anxiety and his senses all in a whirl, Dasaratha turned questioning eyes of fear to Vasishtha and cried,

"Lo! these signs! Hoarse are the cries of the birds at large, and bode no good. The beasts of the forest pass

from right to left and that presages safety. I feel a dire sinking of the heart and a mist rises before my eyes. What may it be, your Reverence?"

And to him the sage returned sweet answer, "The birds warn us of the near approach of some fearful danger, while the beasts allay it. Let not this trouble thy royal heart."

And upon them thus conversing, there rushed a mighty wind at which the solid earth trembled in affright, and the giant trees of the forest strewed the ground with their shattered limbs. A pall of darkness swept across the bright luminary; the quarters of the earth were confused, North and South, East and West and could scarce be discerned. Next, a shower of ashes rained down and reft them of what little reason they had. Alone, Vasishtha and the other sages, Daṣaraṯha and his sons, appeared to be aware of what was taking place around them.

And in that fearful darkness in which the armies of the king were dimly visible even as so many statues of ashes, they saw a terrible Being approach, with massive coils of matted hair crowning his lofty head. Râma of the Axe was he, the son of Jamaḏagni, of the royal race of Bhrigu,—even the dread One who laid low, time and oft, the proudest heads of the earth. Strong and unassailable even as the mighty Kailâsa, unapproachable even as the Fire of Dissolution, blazed forth his lustre, from which the eyes of ordinary men shrank away blinded. On his lofty shoulders rested the terrible Axe and a huge bow ready strung; his hand grasped a mighty dart, even as the Lord Mahâḏêva when he went forth against the Demons of the Three Cities.

Great was the anxiety that filled the heart of Vasishtha and the other sages of pure vows and strict observances; and they spake to one another, "Is it possible that the cruel

fate of his sire still rankles in his heart and he has once again lifted his terrible axe against the royal race on earth ? Dire was the vengeance he took and ample ; he put away his anger and with it his desire for vengeance. It behoves him not to lay his axe once again at the root of the Solar Race ".

They hastened to offer him respect due and sought to pacify the fiery spirit with sweet words of welcome. He of the Axe accepted it of the sages ; and as if heeding them not, haughtily turned towards Râma the son of Ḏaṣaraṯha and cried out.

CHAPTER 75

RÂMA AND RÂMA

"RÂMA ! thou son of Dasaratha, Râma, the voice of fame speaks in no measured tones of thy marvellous might. Thy breaking of the bow of Mahâdeva at Janaka's hall, I know it all. That was a wonderful feat and one would hardly think thee capable of it. Close on the heels of the report I hastened hither with this bow. String thou this weapon of my honoured sire—no light task for thy boyish hands—and fit this shaft to it. Then shall thou convince me of thy boasted might ; and then shall I be pleased to offer thee the coveted honour of battle with me for, thy valour would then entitle thee to be so distinguished."

At which words of terrible import, the aged king turned towards him of the Axe a face blanched with terror and pitiable with grief and hands of humble entreaty and said " A Brâhamana thou and of cloudless fame, thou hadst, long ere this, laid aside thy relentless vengeance against the race of kings. With raised hands I implore thee to harm not my innocent ones. Of the race of Bhrigu thou comest, men renowned for saintly wisdom and chaste vows. Thy word thou passed unto the Lord of the Celestials and laid aside thy weapon of wrath. Thou betookest thyself to the paths of peace and righteousness, made over the earth that was thine by conquest unto Kâsyapa, and sought the quiet solitudes of Mahêndra. And lo! here hast thou come to send us all along the path of destruction ; for, doubt not that we will outlive Râma, our life and soul, if any harm should light on his fair head. "

But Parasurâma seemed to ignore him and his words

and addressed himself again to Râma. "Of yore, Visvakarman, the Architect of the Gods, fashioned two bows, strong, firm and of celestial might, famed through all the worlds. One of them the Gods gave to Siva when he marched forth to destroy the fierce Asuras of the Three Cities ; and *that* was the one you happened to break. The other that I have here, was given to the Lord Vishnu, equal in strength to the one handled by Rudra and no easy thing to essay.

Lo ! how it blazes forth in its divine lustre !

Well, the gods sought out Brahma and questioned him about the respective mights of the Lords Vishnu and Mahâdêva. The Self-born One read into their hearts and set the one against the other. Great was the fight that ensued between the two and frightful to behold ; for, each strove his best to get the better of the other.

Then Vishnu sent forth a mighty shout. 'Hum' he cried and the terrible bow of Mahâdêva gave way, and he himself was stupified thereby. Then, Angels and Gods, sages and saints, approached and implored them to lay aside their wrath. When they beheld the bow of Siva break before the might of Vishnu, the shadow of doubt that lurked in the hearts of the Gods vanished and Vishnu stood the mightier of the two. Having paid high reverence unto Him, they took respectful leave of Rudra and left for their respective regions and Brahma and Indra along with them.

The Lord Mahâdêva, his heart still sore with the sense of defeat, gave his bow and shafts to king Dêvarâta of the Vidêhas : while Vishnu handed over his mighty bow and arrows unto Richika of the line of Bhrigu.

My sire Jamadagni, of unrivalled prowess, got it from him. Later on he engaged himself in severe austerities and unspeakable was the might that accrued to him there-

by: and he laid aside his weapons of war, useless to him and never to be resumed. But, King Arjuna, base of heart, slew in cold blood the unoffending sage. The cruel death of my innocent sire burnt into my heart like molten lead and cried out for vengeance, dire and swift. And I laid my axe at the root of the race of kings, times out of count, as fast as they grew. I wiped them off the face of the earth, which I subdued by the might of my arms. And at a grand sacrifice, I offered it as a gift to the great Kâṣyapa, the Holy One. Thereafter I repaired to Mount Mahênḏra and engaged myself in severe austerities. There do I yet remain, in that happy resort of Gods and Angels.

But, to-day I happened to hear the Gods speak to one another in the high heavens of thy wonderful feat, in tones of admiration and awe. They said that thou, out of thy marvellous energy, broke asunder the divine bow of Ṣiva ; and all at once I hastened thither to assure myself of the truth of the report.

Take thou this bow, used of yore by the Lord Vishṉu. Walk in the path of thy forefathers of stainless fame. Fit thou this shaft of fiery energy unto the string. Well, if thou but succeed in doing that, I shall then be glad to offer thee a chance to measure thyself with me."

CHAPTER 76

THE BITER BIT

RÂMA heard him out; his father's presence kept back the hot words that rose to his lips; yet, he managed to reply in cool and even accents of icy disdain.

"Worthy descendant of Bhrigu! Not unknown to me your fierce deeds, which I excuse in consideration of the debt of vengeance you owe your honored sire. But you seem to regard me as a low specimen of the warrior class, weak and despicable, fallen from the high traditions of his forefathers. Well, this day shall you have a chance of knowing me better; and shall convince yourself of my energy and valour."

A storm of suppressed wrath shook his powerful frame as he, with a quick motion and grace, took the bow and arrow from the hands of the dread son of Jamadagni. Playfully he strung it and laid the arrow on the string; then turned himself to Râma of the Axe and cried in words winged with angry flame,

"This divine shaft, used by the Lord Vishnu, strikes down the mighty and shrivels up the energy and pride of him against whom it is discharged. None can shoot it in vain. But you are a Brâhmana and an object of reverence unto me; and doubly so, in that you claim kinship with my venerable Master, Visvâmitra. That alone keeps back the shaft, which, else, would have drunk your heart's blood ere this.

Now, which do you choose? Shall I deprive you of the high regions you have won by the force of your Tapas; or of your unimpeded power of motion through the worlds above and below?".

Meanwhile, Gandharvas and Apsarasas, Siddhas and Chûranas, Kinnaras and Yakshas, Râkshasas and Nâgas, sages and gods, flocked to the spot to behold that wonderful sight, and at their head, the Ancient of Days, Brahma. They saw the son of Dasaratha as he stood there, his hand grasping the mighty bow of Vishnu and the dread shaft drawn to his ear and ready to take its flight. The beings of the Earth stood dazed and listless; while the haughty son of Jamadagni felt himself drained of his valour and fiery might and gazed powerlessly on the hero. The superior energy of Râma absorbed his proud strength and sunk him in torpor quite.

Then, lifting eyes of lack-lustre hue to the bright-eyed boy before him, he spoke in accents slow and painful.

"Of yore, I made a gift of this broad earth to Kâsyapa. 'A moment ago' said he, 'you were lord of the world, but now it is mine. And you shall not stay in my dominions.' The words of the great One are a law unto me ; and I make it a point never to pass the night here. I have given my word unto Kâsyapa that the Earth shall be his. So I would even request you take not from me my power of free motion through the worlds. Quicker than a flash of thought, shall I speed back to whence I came, the beautiful Mount Mahêndra. Worlds of surpassing glory have I won by my hard Tapas; this powerful dart shall destroy them for me. Delay not. Your wonderful mastery of this divine weapon has opend my eyes to the great truth. Know I not that Thou art the Changeless One, the Destroyer of Madhu, whom the Lords of Light are proud to call their God and Ruler. All glory be hine, Thou scourge of the wicked ! Behold the Shining Ones ranged along the sky, gazing with never satisfied eyes on Thee, of unparalleled fame, and of unapproachable energy in battle. No sense of disgrace do I feel at being discomfited by Thee, the Lord

of the Universe. Let loose the shaft, I pray Thee and soon shalt Thou see me taking my way to Mahêndra."

Then Srî Râma discharged the arrow of divine might; and the son of Jamadagni lost the bright regions that he had made his own by his long and severe Tapas. Râma of the Axe went round in meek reverence Râma, the son of Dasaratha and sang his praises high. The bright gods ranged along the firmament took up the strain and made the welkin ring with their shouts of joy. Back sped Parasurâma to Mount Mahêndra; and the Earth and the sky were bright again and clear and the quarters thereof.

CHAPTER 77

BACK TO AYODHYÂ

WHEN Râma of the Axe had taken his departure, the victor handed over the bow and arrows to Varuna of unspeakable might, who stood by invisible to the rest. He then saluted Vasishtha and the other sages with profound reverence, and turning to his sire found him still dazed with grief and fear.

"Jamadagni's fiery son," cried he "is far away by this time, and will not return in a hurry. Give orders to your forces and retinue to resume their march towards Ayôdhyâ, delayed by this trifling annoyance. See you not they wait for it impatiently?"

"Gone is Jamadagni's son"—these words fell like sweet music on the ears of the afflicted Dasaratha and brought him round. He strained his darling to his breast, smelt him on the head, felt him all over to see whether he was safe and said to himself, "Verily, this day have I passed through the dread portals of Death and come back among the living—I and my dear son." And with a bright face he directed his troops to proceed to his capital.

Right royal and hearty was the welcome his happy citizens accorded to their beloved monarch, of untarnished glory, come back among them with his sons of mighty arms. They advanced to meet him, even when he was far away from the city and lined the roads leading thereto. And Dasaratha entered his capital amidst the hearty blessings of the Brâhmanas and the jubilant shouts of welcome of his loyal subjects. Gaily they decked it for the occasion; the roads were swept clean and well-watered and strewed thick with sweet flowers of rare perfume;

pennons and flags, banners and streamers, festoons and garlands, triumphal arches and inscriptions met him on every side ; sweet strains of music, vocal and instrumental, gay and solemn, martial and melodious greeted his pleased ears wherever he turned. And thus he and his sons of mighty fame passed on to his royal home, that towered aloft even as the lofty Home of Ice and Snow and as gay and grand. Joy unspeakable filled his aged heart ; for were not his desires fulfilled, even beyond his wildest hopes ?

Meanwhile, Kausalyâ and Sumitra, Kaikêyî and the other queens of Dasaratha, were busily happy with welcoming to their royal home the wives of their sons, as became their rank and station—Sîtâ, and Ûrmilâ, Mândavî and Srutakîrti. The princesses were next taken to the temples of the gods to offer reverent worship and humble thanksgiving--(dressed in gay robes and flashing with gems and gold), while bards and minstrels, poets and eulogists called down every blessing on their fair heads. Next, they paid their respects to every one that deserved it and repaired unto their mansions, that put to blush the lordly home of the Guardian of Riches. They made large gifts to Brâhmanas, of kine, gold and corn, and passed their lives in the enjoyment of every kind of pleasure, in the sweet company of their lords.

And the royal sons of the Lord of Ayôdhyâ, those great-souled Ones, of unequalled fame on earth, ever waited on their noble sire with sweet solicitude, anticipating his least wishes. The hearts of their elders they won by their bright virtues and rare tact ; and they were not the ones to let any chance go by. Their days were one long dream of unalloyed bliss ; for, wherein did they lack ? Married to the loves of their hearts, perfect in every art of warfare, with the wealth of the worlds at their disposal, and

surrounded by friends who lived in them and for them alone, how could their happiness be otherwise than ideal?

Sometime after, his father called Bharata unto him and said, " Bharata dear, Yudhâjit, your uncle and son of the ruler of Kêkaya, waits here to take you with him unto his kingdom. Him have I promised thereunto at Mithilâ, in the presence of the saintly ascetics. It behoves you to go with him and gladden his heart."

" Nothing would please me better" replied Bharata. He saluted his sire and Râma, lovingly embraced Lakshmana, ; and taking kind leave of his mothers and of his mighty brother Râma, the sweet friend of all beings, he took his departure, accompanied, of course, by the inseparable Satrughna.

Râma and Lakshmana, thus left behind, waited upon their godly sire of unparalleled renown. Under the advice and guidance of his father, Râma, the soul of virtue, looked after the interests and welfare of the citizens ; but, withal, the duties to his parents and elders were his first care and lay next his heart. Even thus did he endear himself to all by his sweet ways and saintly life, father and mother, Brâhmanas grown grey in sacred lore, and the loyal citizens, happy under the benign rule of his father. His unfailing might, and ideal virtues outran his growing fame ; and all looked up to him in love and reverence, even as the created beings regard their Lord and Maker, the Self-Born One.

And the happy years chased one another with light feet as they tripped over the heads of Râma and the love of his heart, Sîtâ, the fairest of the daughters of the Earth, as centred in each other, they grew more and more into each other's soul and being. Dear was Sîtâ unto Râma, as the wife of his sire's choice ; and dearer yet did she make

herself unto him, through her divine loveliness and rare excellences. And Sîtâ loved her lord with a love passing speech, passing belief. He was the life of her life, the soul of her soul. And heart spoke to heart plainer and more powerfully than feeble words, poor expressions of the myriad-hued human thought. Râma's heart went out to her, as it did to no one else, to this daughter of Janaka, the royal sage of Mithilâ, fair as a goddess, even as the Divine Mother come down among mortals. Nay, the Almighty Parents, Vishnu and Lakshmî, had not a brighter home and a happier than Râma in the sweet company of his princess of ravishing beauty, whose love towards that worthy son of the royal sage was boundless as Eternity, stronger than Fate.